
Reviewed by Robert S. Norris, Natural Resources Defense Council

Anyone reading Gerard DeGroot’s *The Bomb: A Life* would have to conclude that some pretty strange things happened here on planet earth when it came to trying to live with the Bomb during the second half of the twentieth century. DeGroot, a history professor at the University of St. Andrews, writes with a skeptical eye and a wry sense of humor, though his occasional attempts at a joke may cause a grimace. The book is an ambitious attempt to cover the nuclear era in a single volume, but it focuses more on the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s than on later decades. *The Bomb* is a welcome addition to the literature and might serve as a text for a course about the arms race and the Cold War.

As we move further in time from and begin reflecting on what transpired during this period, the logic, official pronouncements and explanations, and mind-set that surrounded the Bomb look more and more outlandish. Civil defense programs and the original MX intercontinental ballistic missile basing scheme are two examples among many. A new nomenclature was invented to try to make nuclear wars seem logical, palatable, and winnable. For DeGroot this reached an apotheosis in the figure of Herman Kahn, whose book *On Thermonuclear War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1960) “is a massive window into a warped mind.”

DeGroot’s approach is close to that in Paul Boyer’s *By the Bomb’s Early Light* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994) and Spencer Weart’s *Nuclear Fear* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989) in recounting the cultural, social, and psychological manifestations of the Bomb. The book contains little examination of domestic policy, geopolitics, or international crises. The short chapter on the Cuban missile crisis is particularly thin, as is DeGroot’s description and understanding of the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). DeGroot draws on the standard works in the secondary literature and eschews any archival research into primary sources. He offers no new document discoveries or novel interpretations, but he tells a good tale in a lively and accessible manner and is an able guide in revisiting this harrowing journey. We wonder how we made it through without blowing ourselves up.

The book is descriptive rather than analytical, providing no overarching arguments that bind the work together or any attempt to explain the big issues. One theme that recurs is the bomb’s effect on science and the scientists. Throughout the nuclear era, especially during the Manhattan Project and the quest for the hydrogen
bomb that followed, scientists were attracted to the Bomb because of the sheer intellectual excitement it engendered. Ethics often took a backseat. Repeatedly, as De Groot notes, “[s]cientific possibility . . . smothered moral doubt.” A few scientists may have written agonized letters about the morality of the bomb, but thousands of others worked diligently to create weapons of ever greater lethality and quantity. This was true of scientists in the United States as well as those in the Soviet Union and elsewhere.

One of the “abiding truths of American Cold war policy” traced by DeGroot was the belief that possessing nuclear weapons provided security and that the larger the number and the better the quality of the bombs you had, the safer you would be. The two superpowers chased this chimera for decades, tempting Armageddon in the process. DeGroot does not delve deeply into what animated the arms race, and the book would have been stronger if he had explored this in more detail. One contributing cause was the interlocking interservice rivalries in the United States and the Soviet Union. The military services in each country scrambled after the newest weapons and used the threat of their opposite number as the rationale. Congress contributed its own fuel. Key members of the congressional committees on armed services and appropriations funneled enormous amounts of money to their congressional districts, and local governments and corporations were happy to receive it.

DeGroot is better at describing how the U.S. government sought to instill fear in the public. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles laid out the approach: “In order to make the country bear the burden we have to create an emotional atmosphere akin to wartime psychology. We must create the idea of a threat from without.” DeGroot could have pointed out that this technique is still being used today, although the enemy has changed. But the problem now, as then, is that being scared 24 hours a day is too burdensome, and apathy, distraction, and disbelief inevitably set in. Only the periods of real fear brought people into the streets and forced governments to respond.

Occasionally DeGroot’s book contains an alarming sentence with no footnotes to indicate where the information came from. He claims that General Leslie Groves told Harry Truman that the bomb would nullify the need for an invasion of Japan and save one-and-a-half million lives and that Josif Stalin saw the sketch of Fat Man (the bomb produced by the Manhattan Project) before Franklin Roosevelt's death. Neither of these things actually happened. In describing how many people might have been in Hiroshima on the morning of 6 August 1945, he claims: “There were also nearly 5,000 Americans, mainly children sent to Japan after their parents—US citizens of Japanese origin—had been interned.” DeGroot offers no source for this stunning remark and blithely continues on. Had he done a little more research, he could have avoided this blunder. It is true that nationalities other than Japanese were living in Hiroshima. John Dower estimates that possibly as many as 3,200 second-generation Japanese Americans may have been in the city. They had been temporarily visiting Japan and got stranded there after Pearl Harbor. According to Dower, by extrapolating the casualty rates it is possible that as many as 1,000 American citizens—men, women, and children—were killed by the Hiroshima bomb. This is quite different from DeGroot’s assertion that many thousands of children were sent to Japan after their
parents were incarcerated during the second half of 1942 and that they were later killed by the nuclear bomb.

DeGroot moves quickly through more recent decades and concludes with a chapter detailing our present plight, which includes a disastrous health and environmental legacy in both the United States and Russia as a result of building tens of thousands of nuclear weapons and the prospect of several new countries possessing nuclear weapons. With all of this and more ahead of us, the life of The Bomb will have many more chapters.


Reviewed by Jacques Stern, Ecole Normale Supérieure, Paris

Among the many books devoted to cryptology and its history, *A Brief History of Cryptology* has several distinctive features. First, the author, J. V. Boone, a former U.S. Air Force officer who has worked at the National Security Agency (NSA) for many years, has chosen to view cryptology as an element in a triad that also includes the closely associated fields of communications and computers, and to show how new developments in each field have had dramatic consequences for the others’ progress, finally resulting in a tight integration of all three technologies. Even to those familiar with the history of cryptology, the book appears novel in revealing or at least reminding us of many facts pertaining to such things as the introduction of radio and the advent of solid-state electronics and satellites. Also, the approach adopted by Boone restores the complexity of cryptography, which is not only a matter of mathematics but a subtle combination of mathematics, technology, and brain power. A particularly inspiring example of this complexity is provided by the history of voice encryption (cryptophony), which is discussed at several places in the book.

Boone’s main goal of presenting facts is a strength that allows him to give a concise overview of cryptology through the centuries, covering major achievements and activities across the field. Concise does not mean dull. On the contrary, all milestone accomplishments in the three fields are described together with an introduction to the talented people who spearheaded developments and applications. The book also includes many illustrations of the equipment and systems as well as the people involved, something that is often missing in other works on this topic, especially for the last hundred years, which the book emphasizes. These features allow Boone to tell an exciting story, despite the book’s surface appearance as little more than a diary. His background assists him in this respect. In addition to his Air Force and intelligence work, he served as deputy director for research and engineering at the U.S. Department of Defense. Besides his perfect knowledge of the technical developments of the field, he has had access to the excellent iconography at the National Cryptologic Museum and of course, to many secrets. However, a warning to the reader is in order: The book it-
self reveals no secrets. Boone does no more than hint at even recently declassified matters. He provides facts, names, dates, and pictures, but gives no intricate explanations of the inner workings of pieces of equipment and no precise descriptions of cryptological algorithms in either the text or a brief appendix. Boone also avoids entering into the controversies that have surrounded cryptology. He mentions public debate over secrecy and export controls only in the summary that appears as chapter 8, and he expresses no position on these matters.

Boone writes primarily from an intelligence and command-and-control viewpoint, which readers from a different environment might find biased toward technology over people. In many areas, such as academic research or patent law, the date of an invention given in the book is the date of its disclosure. For example, we learn about the alleged discovery of public-key cryptography at the British General Communications Headquarters (a fact that has been declassified only recently) six pages before reading the names of Whitfield Diffie and Martin Hellman, unanimously acknowledged as the inventors. But Boone’s perspective also has positive effects. Nowhere in the academic literature can we find such a clear account of the difficulties and progress of cryptophony, from SIGSALY to STU-III, obviously because these pieces of equipment were developed and produced under classified programs.

Boone’s book not only is worth reading but is useful to keep close at hand for the numerous references it provides. A Brief History of Cryptology does not supersede other books on the history of cryptology (e.g., those by David Kahn) but supplements them with a different viewpoint. Unfortunately, the book does not thoroughly discuss the most recent history, notably the post–Cold War era, which is covered in only a few pages. In light of Boone’s knowledge of the cryptology of the twentieth century, as well as his choice to highlight the integration of several technologies during this period, it would have been interesting to learn his views on the consequences of this integration on military or civilian concepts discussed today, such as network-centric warfare or trusted computing. Maybe this could be the subject of another book.


*Reviewed by Susan Ware, Warren Center, Harvard University*

The genesis of Linda Eisenmann’s broad survey of higher education for women from 1945 to 1965 can be traced to her attempt to understand the history and ongoing relevance of Radcliffe’s Bunting Institute, where she was the assistant director, as it approached its thirty-fifth anniversary in 1995. The institute’s founding in 1960 by Radcliffe President Mary (Polly) Bunting was prescient in its recognition of the need for assistance to and encouragement of women scholars whose careers had been interrupted or derailed because of family commitments. But Eisenmann soon realized that the institute was also part of a legacy of activism and advocacy, albeit a narrow one,
surrounding women’s educational needs and contributions that had been quietly making progress since World War II. Even though this advocacy lacked the punch and force of later feminist activism, Eisenmann convincingly demonstrates that these early efforts were important in their own right. She also argues that they must be understood on their own terms; that is, within the context of what was educationally possible and intellectually feasible in the 1950s rather than measured against the more radical and strident activism of a later period. In restoring this overlooked chapter to the history of higher education and women, Eisenmann also makes an important contribution to our understanding of postwar American society.

In her introduction Eisenmann poses what she calls “two interpretive challenges and one revisionist task” (p. 3). The first interpretive challenge concerns why women were nearly invisible to postwar educational leaders and policymakers, despite making up almost one-third of college students. Early chapters concentrate on what she identifies as four ideologies—patriotic duty, economic participation, cultural role, and psychological needs—that shaped and limited the expectations of female students and the institutions in which they were enrolled. Readers will glean much useful information here about the changing undergraduate population, the differential impact of the G.I. Bill on male and female students, and the huge impact of the National Defense Education Act of 1958 on institutions of higher education, among other topics. Eisenmann does not, however, describe the actual experiences of female undergraduates on campuses during the postwar period. Another limit, one imposed by the parameters of the topic, is that the story tends to focus primarily on the needs of white, middle-class students, precisely because that was the demographic nature of the female college population in 1945–1965.

Eisenmann’s second interpretive challenge concerns the nature of the advocacy for women and women’s issues. In the immediate postwar period, when activists were unwilling to associate themselves with feminism and when little if any general support existed for a major reexamination of women’s roles and lives, educational activists by necessity and choice spoke in muted tones that downplayed basic political and institutional change in favor of an emphasis on individual choice. Through close examination of organizations and groups such as the Commission on the Education of Women (supported by the American Council on Education), the American Association of University Women, the National Association of Deans of Women, and the President’s Commission on the Status of Women during the Kennedy administration, Eisenmann analyzes what she calls the “adaptive activism of postwar advocates for women” (p. 2). She puts forth a similar theme when she surveys the emergence of women’s continuing education programs in the early 1960s.

The revisionist aspect of her narrative is her attempt to place this activism within the specific context of postwar America, restoring the contributions of a generation of educational activists to the historical record and arguing that their activism was an important bridge to later change. Even though this earlier activism seems tame to modern readers, Eisenmann urges us not to ignore or dismiss it. These advocates laid the groundwork for later initiatives by collecting data and research on women. They also
built networks, organizations, and initiatives that countered somewhat the lack of attention generally given to questions of gender and education from 1945 to 1965.

Eisenmann's research and analysis are best when she is presenting her closely reasoned institutional case studies, which successfully situate her activists within the broader educational and social landscape. Her account of postwar American culture is less original, although it does fit into the general historiographic trend that moves beyond stereotypes of the complacent 1950s to see more activism and challenge coalescing, or at least percolating, than previously recognized. To Eisenmann's credit, she resists the temptation to give her actors too much credit and is always mindful of the limits of their vision, which focused on individual choice rather than collective action or broad societal change. Perhaps at times she wished to tell a flashier story about the changes in higher education for women since the 1960s, but readers will be grateful that she stuck to this earlier, quieter time. Once again, the postwar period often referred to in shorthand as “the fifties” turns out to have been far more complicated and interesting than previously thought.


Reviewed by Thomas R. Maddux, California State University, Northridge

Mark White has selected an interesting and relatively neglected topic, the role and impact of dissenters in the White House on important Cold War issues from 1945 through 1968. He consulted pertinent primary and secondary sources and presents a well-written study that is accessible to both students and specialists. Whether all of White's dissenters really qualify as such is open to question. The main area that could profit from further analysis is the issue of lessons learned from this study, most notably the question of why dissent is so limited and ineffective in the context of modern American foreign policy-making.

White covers the Cold War administrations from Harry Truman through Lyndon Baines Johnson, discussing an adviser in each. With the Truman administration, he starts with Joseph Davies, Harry Hopkins, and Henry Wallace. Davies, a former ambassador to the Soviet Union, and Hopkins, a former adviser to Franklin D. Roosevelt, gained entry to Truman in the spring of 1945 as the new president faced many challenges. Davies received considerable attention from Truman, who sent him off to discuss how to respond to Josif Stalin with Winston Churchill in May 1945 at the same time that Truman sent Hopkins to meet with Stalin in the Kremlin and use either a “baseball bat” or “diplomatic language” to get the Soviet leader to carry out the Yalta agreements. Hopkins had greater short-term success than Davies, but neither official was sufficiently involved in policymaking or in the administration long enough to qualify as a dissenter from Truman's Cold War policies. Wallace, who had been secretary of commerce and later served as vice president under Roosevelt, posed a
more direct challenge to Truman in the spring of 1945 until Truman fired him in September. As one of the most significant New Dealers in Truman’s administration, Wallace pushed to keep the wartime Soviet-American partnership alive, an effort that, as White points out, was spurred on by Wallace’s uncritical perspective on Stalin and Soviet policies in Eastern Europe. When Wallace kept expressing his views in public forums that upset other foreign policy advisers, Truman told Wallace he had to stop making speeches that dealt with foreign policy issues and a few days later asked him to resign.

White could have selected a more significant dissenter in the Truman administration; for example, George Kennan, who directed the State Department’s new Policy Planning Staff from May 1947 until the end of 1949. As a leading advocate of the strategy of containment, Kennan did not anticipate being a dissenter, but he increasingly found himself in disagreement with the White House and Secretary of State Dean Acheson about the relative importance of military containment of the Soviet Union; the desirability of negotiations with Stalin, particularly on the German issue; and the wisdom of using the rhetoric of the Truman Doctrine to expand the Cold War competition into a global conflict.

White’s choice of a dissenter in the 1950s is Secretary of Defense Charles Wilson, another official who was not that sustained and vigorous in his dissent when he took up Indochina starting with the crisis precipitated by the impending French defeat at Dien Bien Phu. A visit to the Far East in mid-May 1954 reinforced Wilson’s concerns about American involvement, and after the Geneva Conference that month Wilson’s dissent became more direct. In several National Security Council (NSC) meetings, Wilson questioned Secretary of State John Foster Dulles on the wisdom of committing the United States to the South East Asian Treaty Organization, on resisting the proposed election in Vietnam and backing Ngo Dinh Diem, and on defending Laos, Cambodia, and South Vietnam regardless of the prospects and costs. By late October, Wilson urged Dwight Eisenhower and the NSC to reject a plan to train a South Vietnamese army and, instead, get out of Indochina. In the face of a consensus against his views, Wilson retreated by early 1955 and backed the expanding U.S. involvement in Vietnam.

White’s candidates for dissenters in the 1960s, Adlai Stevenson and George Ball, offer a significant contrast between Stevenson, a two-time Democratic presidential candidate and leader of the party’s liberal faction, and Ball, a long-time associate of Stevenson who became a successful lawyer and insider at the State Department. Both men challenged U.S. policy on significant issues, most notably Stevenson on John F. Kennedy’s handling of Cuba and the Cuban missile crisis and Ball on President Johnson’s decisions to escalate in Vietnam in 1965–1966. As rivals for the Democratic nomination in 1960, Stevenson and Kennedy brought some past history into their relationship, and Stevenson, as U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, considered Kennedy inexperienced in foreign affairs, a perspective reinforced in Stevenson’s view by the Bay of Pigs fiasco and Kennedy’s unwillingness to follow Stevenson’s advice. White views Kennedy as shifting toward Stevenson’s position during the missile crisis, although the president rejected Stevenson’s suggestion of negotiating with the Soviet
leader Nikita Khrushchev before announcing a naval blockade of Cuba. Kennedy also, along with a number of his advisers, criticized Stevenson for his recommendations during subsequent deliberations.

Ball’s role as the in-house Vietnam critic has received more attention. His role exemplifies the limits to dissent within the U.S. foreign policymaking structure—limits that the Cold War made even more constricting. White could have paid greater attention to this reality in his conclusion, which does call for more questioning of assumptions and consideration of consequences. Most of his dissenters were unwilling to jeopardize their partisan political and personal affiliations or their employment status and future prospects by resigning and taking a public stance of dissent. As White notes, Ball’s role as a dissenter on Vietnam was tardy and inconsistent. Like most of White’s dissenters, Ball backed off when faced with opposition from peers within the policymaking elite and criticism from the president. After helping to draft the Tonkin Gulf resolution to Congress in 1964, Ball became more critical about plans to bomb North Vietnam and send in U.S. ground combat forces. Yet when faced with criticism from Johnson’s top advisers, he backed off, stayed on the inside, and rode the tiger with the president.


Reviewed by David A. Baldwin, Princeton University

The title of this collection of twelve essays conveys its main theme concisely. The authors try, with varying degrees of success, to avoid viewing American national security policy since World War II in traditional terms organized by different administrations or wars. Instead, they focus on the continuities of national security policy from one administration to the next and from one war to the next. An alternative title could well be something like “World War II and Its Aftermath.” Indeed, for Bacevich, it makes no sense to view the period any other way. Even skeptics of the latter point would have to admit that the authors of these essays demonstrate the value of their approach. Insights abound, assumptions are challenged, and perspectives are rearranged. Readers may not agree with everything in this book, but they will never think quite the same way about American national security policy again.

Although books with twelve authors often lack a central focus, this one maintains remarkable coherence despite the wide range of topics addressed. The topics include the ideological framework within which Americans have come to think about national security, the evolution of U.S. military strategy, civil-military relations, the growth of the intelligence community, the emergence of the “national security state,” the moral basis of military service, and the treatment of war in Hollywood films. In each case, the basic question remains the same: How did the period after World War II differ from the previous one?
The essays by Arnold A. Offner, John Prados, and Bacevich himself are especially noteworthy. Offner’s contribution explores the historical and ideological underpinnings of “The National Security Strategy of the United States,” published in 2002 by the administration of George W. Bush. Offner concludes that the document represents not so much a new “American internationalism” as the policy of a “rogue” state (p. 42).

Prados gives an overview of intelligence activities and debunks the frequently heard argument that a recent series of intelligence “failures,” including 9/11, can be attributed to inadequate funding. He also argues that “throughout the Cold War period, spies revealed far more about the spy services on the other side than they did about the adversaries’ intentions or capabilities” (p. 330). Those who think the primary lesson of 9/11 is to demonstrate the need for more “human intelligence” should be required to read this essay.

The crown jewel of this collection, however, is Bacevich’s essay on U.S. civil-military relations since World War II. He challenges the conventional wisdom that the main criterion for judging the health of relations between civilians and the professional military is the likelihood that soldiers will overthrow the government. His compelling argument maintains that “in the years following 1945 ‘civilian control’ not infrequently became little more than a slogan, a useful fiction concealing a reality that was far more fractious, combative, and problematic” (p. 210). This essay alone is worth the price of the book.

Although the 60-year perspective on U.S. national security policy has much to recommend it, it also has at least one drawback. Thirteen days in October 1962 were arguably more crucial, and deserving of more attention, than all the rest of the period put together. This is especially true with respect to civil-military relations. Whatever the deficiencies of Robert McNamara’s management style as U.S. defense secretary, they were vastly outweighed by the valuable role he played in helping President John F. Kennedy maintain control of the military during the Cuban missile crisis. Conversely, whatever the military accomplishments of General Curtis LeMay during World War II and thereafter, they were overshadowed—and cancelled out—by his performance during this crisis. Neither LeMay nor many of his fellow generals grasped the way the nuclear age had changed the nature and significance of war. Most of them should never have been allowed within a hundred miles of such weapons. The contempt with which Kennedy and McNamara treated their opinions was richly deserved.

Despite the overall excellence of this volume, two minor flaws should be noted. At least two of the authors attribute the end of the Cold War to the success of the Reagan administration’s national security policies (pp. 76–77, 115). Although this is a common view, it is also a strongly contested one and should be noted as such. Nowhere in the volume is the possibility considered that the Soviet Union’s collapse was primarily caused by domestic political and economic factors having little or nothing to do with U.S. national security policy.

A second flaw is the treatment of the “Bureaucratic Politics Paradigm” in one essay (pp. 119–120). Many legitimate criticisms can be—and have been—made of this
approach, but here it is dismissed on the explicitly “ad hominem” (p. 119) grounds that its progenitors opposed the Vietnam War and “feared having to fight in it” (p. 119). This is not only bad intellectual history, it is unacceptable as scholarly argument. Such disparaging treatment of the bureaucratic politics analytical framework is especially ironic insofar as many of the other essays clearly demonstrate the framework’s value.

Overall this volume is a valuable resource for scholars, students, and any reader interested in American national security policy. It would be especially useful in undergraduate and graduate courses on American foreign policy.


Reviewed by Dianne Kirby, University of Ulster

Although the death of Pope John Paul prompted media claims that he helped to precipitate the collapse of the USSR and the demise of Communism, the role of religion in the Cold War was for a long time one of the most neglected aspects of Cold War historiography. For example, Melvyn Leffler’s *A Preponderance of Power: National Security Policy, the Truman Administration, and the Cold War* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992), a critically acclaimed study of the Cold War, does not address religion, nor do Vladislav Zubok and Constantine Pleshakov in their book *Inside the Kremlin’s Cold War: From Stalin to Khrushchev* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996). Even the much praised cultural study by Walter L. Hixson, *Parting the Curtain: Propaganda, Culture and the Cold War* (New York: Macmillan, 1997), does not attribute any particular significance to religion. My own attempt to draw attention to the importance of religion was an edited collection, *Religion and the Cold War* (New York: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2003), and more recent contributions include Angela M. Lahr’s *Millennial Dreams and Apocalyptic Nightmares: The Cold War Origins of Political Evangelicalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007) and Michael Phayer’s *Pius XII, The Holocaust, and the Cold War* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008). Merrilyn Thomas’s *Communing with the Enemy: Covert Operations, Christianity and Cold War Politics in Britain and the GDR* is a welcome and valuable contribution to this emerging field.

Thomas presents an in-depth case study of the 1965 Coventry-Dresden project of reconciliation. A group of idealistic Coventry volunteers raised funds and provided their services to help rebuild a church hospital in Dresden. Thomas subjects every aspect of the enterprise and its diverse range of players to systematic scrutiny, drawing on British and German archival sources, including those of the former East German State Security Ministry (Stasi). Her research included interviews with participants, from priests and politicians to secret agents, in the covert operations into which she delves. The result is meticulous scholarship spiced with mysterious characters from
the murky depths of secret operations and espionage. Most important, the study provides detailed analyses and insights into the complex, multidimensional role accorded religion by all sides in the Cold War.

Thomas explores how the German Democratic Republic (GDR) and Great Britain each sought to seduce the other side with promises of mutual interest and cooperation in terms of promoting Christian-Marxist dialogue. Each intended the proffered cooperation to be but another means of subversion, in addition to securing more immediate goals. The British Foreign Office wanted peace and stability in Europe that would insure against a confrontation over Germany that might lead to military conflict between East and West. Walter Ulbricht’s regime in the GDR wanted better church-state relations, mainly for domestic reasons.

Religion was integral to Western attempts to promote disaffection and instability behind the Iron Curtain without recourse to direct military action. Thomas is undeterred by the fact that the funding and use of religion for political purposes are partly concealed in the murky world of intelligence activities. Her dogged research confirms that the churches were subject to the same sort of infiltration and manipulation as that accorded to other influential bodies such as students, intellectuals, artists, scientists, and trade unions. Early covert action relied on private organizations, whose activities are notoriously difficult to document, especially in the case of Christianity with a plethora of poor churches and worthy causes, making Thomas’s detailed documentation extremely useful.

Governments through the ages have appreciated how a combination of state and spiritual power can be critical for the success of social, economic, and political measures. The new postwar Communist regimes proved no exception. The support given by Communist governments to Christian churches, and vice versa, derived from a variety of domestic and foreign policy considerations, not least self-preservation. The precarious situation of Christian churches in the Soviet bloc was exacerbated by the Western countries’ tendency to appropriate Christianity as part of their anti-Communist arsenal. Communist regimes became even more wary of these potentially subversive institutions in their midst. Western encouragement of religious opposition increased Communist suspicion of church activity, causing more of the suppression and surveillance that alienated their own populations and fueled Western propaganda. The image of persecuted Christians aroused fear and loathing, reinforced the concept of “evil” Communism, and contributed to the emergence of the “lesser evil” doctrine, the justification for Western misdeeds in the name of “containment.”

In the immediate postwar period, Pope Pius XII positioned Roman Catholicism as the locus of ideological opposition to Communism. He called on all Christendom to join him in an anti-Communist crusade and supported the attempts of President Harry Truman to marshal religious forces into a united front against the USSR. In response, the Communist bloc repudiated Western propaganda that Christianity and Communism were incompatible and that the latter sought to eradicate the former. Thomas’s investigation is of particular value in providing crucial insights into the Christian-based underground network that was evidently directed by the U.S. Central
Intelligence Agency (CIA), the aim of which was to create conditions in Soviet-bloc countries that would allow a gradual reform process to take place. It is also a telling commentary on how politicians understood and sought to harness the power of Christianity, with Christian leaders eager to play a role in shaping the future of the world.

A question that Thomas does not address, but that is of significant interest, is the extent to which the United States was informed about or involved in the Coventry-Dresden project. The religious dimension of the Cold War was of particular significance to the United States, a country whose people and leaders stressed their religiosity and considered their country a special moral force in the world. In 1949 the CIA established the National Committee for a Free Europe as a front to mobilize dissent by exploiting Eastern Europe’s spiritual and moral resources. Religious belief was an important basis for American faith in the liberation of the captive peoples behind the Iron Curtain. The CIA funded propaganda organizations that sought to stir up religious feeling against Communist governments. U.S. Information Service programs emphasized “the great appeal of godliness versus godlessness.” Voice of America broadcasts repeatedly attacked Soviet tyranny as hostile to religion.

It seems unlikely that either West Germany or Britain would have risked upsetting its notoriously sensitive American ally in an area it considered of vital importance. Hence, Thomas’s findings have important implications that invite further research in U.S. sources, building on the foundation that Thomas has so carefully constructed.

Thomas argues that “Christianity and Christians played a vital role in the political strategy designed to bring about a gradual and controlled undermining of the Soviet bloc” (p. 14). She convincingly demonstrates that Christians and their far-reaching networks, through their secret work with politicians, governments, and intelligence agencies, worked toward a peaceful reconstruction of the world order. Yet in the post–Cold War period, Christians were disappointed with what passed for peace and stability, as the transition to democracy and free markets unleashed ethnic hatred, religious zealotry, crime, corruption, and a massive disparity between rich and poor, as well as secularization and deep divisions in the Christian community.

The unpredicted resurgence of religion in global society has heightened awareness of its potency as a political force and re-legitimized it as an object of study. Merrilyn Thomas’s groundbreaking book yields new perspectives and raises a range of intriguing questions. The answers to these questions will greatly enhance our understanding of the complexities and ambiguities of Cold War history and the role of religion.

Reviewed by Mark Atwood Lawrence, University of Texas at Austin

Recent releases of source material around the world have enabled historians to make huge advances in understanding once-opaque aspects of the Vietnam War. Scholars can now write with considerable confidence, for example, about North Vietnamese, Chinese, or Soviet decision-making. Yet one dimension of the war—unquestionably one of the most important to any overall appraisal—has remained cloaked in mystery: the attitudes and opinions of ordinary Vietnamese in whose name leaders in Hanoi, Saigon, and Washington carried on the fight.

Robert J. Topmiller’s study of a major Buddhist uprising against the South Vietnamese government in 1966 promises to address this problem by illuminating popular attitudes below the seventeenth parallel. Topmiller focuses tightly on a series of events that played out mainly in two South Vietnamese cities—Hue and Danang—over just a few weeks. But he offers bold conclusions. The protests, Topmiller argues, reflected the widespread popularity of distinctly Buddhist aspirations to establish democracy in South Vietnam and to end the war through a compromise settlement. Moreover, Topmiller contends, U.S. leaders erred badly by failing to see the uprising for what it was—a powerful sign that U.S. forces lacked sufficient support within South Vietnam and therefore should be withdrawn.

Although curiously brief, *The Lotus Unleashed* merits the attention of scholars of the Vietnam War. Most important, the book provides an unprecedentedly detailed account of a little-studied episode that caused profound doubt within the United States about the durability of the South Vietnamese government. The uprising, sparked by an abrupt consolidation of power by the military junta in Saigon, led parts of the South Vietnamese Army to defect to the Buddhist side and threatened the entire anti-Communist war effort in South Vietnam’s crucial northernmost provinces. The uprising even led to fighting between U.S. and South Vietnamese forces as U.S. Marines tried to keep peace between rebels and government troops. By the time the Saigon government suppressed the rebellion, 150 Vietnamese had been killed, and 150 Vietnamese and 23 Americans had been wounded. Topmiller convincingly argues that this depressing spectacle amounted to a “turning point” in the war because it dramatically widened the gap between the Johnson administration and antiwar critics (p. 115). The administration, deeply alarmed by the crisis, carefully weighed its options—including abandonment of the war—but ultimately recommitted itself to its partnership with the Saigon government. At the same time, many members of Congress and the American public, disgusted by incessant infighting in South Vietnam, firmly shifted into the antiwar camp.

The book also offers useful insights into South Vietnamese ideology and politics. Merely by highlighting urban settings, Topmiller makes clear that scholars must look beyond the peasantry—the overwhelming focus of nearly all inquiry into South Viet-
namese opinion—to grasp the full complexity of the subject. Topmiller also deserves credit for exploring Buddhist theology, a subject as unfamiliar to many scholars of the war as it was to U.S. officials who tried to make sense of Buddhist activism in the 1960s. To understand the 1966 uprising, Topmiller sensibly suggests, it is necessary to grasp the principles of non-violence, social harmony, and democracy espoused by the Buddhists. Perhaps most of all, Topmiller succeeds in showing that Buddhist leaders, while eager to topple the Saigon regime, opposed Communism as well. Champions of a third way, the Buddhists aimed to establish a coalition government representing all of South Vietnam’s major political groupings. Topmiller’s sensitivity to the coherence and distinctiveness of Buddhist thought helps to rebut old accusations by U.S. officials—revived by conservative scholars in recent years—that Buddhist activists were merely Communist agents.

Unfortunately, however, Topmiller falls short in substantiating his claim that Buddhist ideals “resonated deeply with the Vietnamese people” (p. ix). His problem seems to be the same one that has stymied previous efforts to plumb South Vietnamese public opinion—the lack of sources reflecting the opinions of ordinary people. To be sure, Topmiller deserves credit for exhaustively analyzing U.S. documents and for interviewing more than 80 Vietnamese, mostly one-time leaders of the Buddhist movement. But these sources reveal little about attitudes beneath the leadership level. What drove thousands of Vietnamese to follow Buddhist leaders’ high-minded calls for rebellion? Genuine dedication to Buddhist principles? Or something else? Simple war-weariness? Provincial suspicion of Saigon’s authority? Distinctly urban grievances? Sympathy for the National Liberation Front? To answer these questions with any confidence would seem to require careful reading of Vietnamese archival sources and newspapers, materials totally absent from Topmiller’s study. The book’s brevity adds to the uncertainty. Oddly, Topmiller rarely allows participants in the uprising—even the leaders—to speak for themselves through quotations. On the contrary, the reader is almost entirely dependent on Topmiller’s generalizations. Without additional substantiation, those generalizations simply cannot be convincing.

They are suspect for another reason, as well: Topmiller’s obvious sympathy for Buddhist thought and for the radical Buddhist leaders who did most to challenge the Saigon regime in 1966. To his credit, he makes no effort to hide his opinions. “The heroes in this book are the South Vietnamese who risked everything for peace,” he states at the outset, praising the “moral quality” of the Buddhist movement (p. x). He even dedicates the book to Buddhists “who sacrificed everything to bring peace to their country” (dedication page). It is easy to share Topmiller’s enthusiasm for individuals who stood up to the corrupt, venal, and ruthless South Vietnamese regime. But it is also easy to doubt whether Topmiller possesses sufficient scholarly detachment from his subject to weigh motives and results judiciously.

Reviewed by Warren Wellde Williams, U.S. Green Berets (ret.)

Lawrence R. Bailey, a retired U.S. Army colonel, was the first member of the American military to be captured and imprisoned by forces hostile to the United States in Southeast Asia after World War II. On 23 March 1961, while serving as assistant Army attaché at the U.S. embassy in Vientiane, Laos, then-Major Bailey hitched a ride to Saigon in a C-47–type aircraft flown by a young Air Force lieutenant. The plane was manned by a crew of five other U.S. servicemen and carried one other passenger. The flight was supposed to be a milk run. The only warfare in Laos at the time consisted of a series of “ill-defined and inconsequential skirmishes far away from Vientiane” (p. 3). Few if any Americans even knew about the confrontation between Royalist Laotian forces and the Communist Pathet Lao, aided by a group of rebel “Neutralist” paratroopers, under the command of Captain Kong Le and heavily supported by the Viet Minh and Soviet Union. Americans had not yet entered the fray, at least formally.

Prior to takeoff, Bailey was given the choice of the sole backpack parachute on board or one of the several chest packs. The backpack had to be worn all the time and was uncomfortable. Chest packs consisted only of the harnesses, with the actual parachute kit stowed in the aircraft’s cargo compartment, to be clipped on if needed. Hence, most crew members preferred the much more comfortable chest packs. But Bailey, perhaps because of his experience with backpacks while flying B-29s in World War II, chose the backpack. Approximately 30 minutes later, this decision was to save his life. He was the sole survivor of the flight—hence the title of the book.

That C-47, code-named Rose Bowl, turned out to be no ordinary cargo aircraft. It was equipped with photographic and electronic surveillance devices, and its mission on that March day was to deviate from a scheduled flight from Vientiane to Saigon and pass over the Plain of Jars to try to pinpoint a navigational beacon used by the Pathet Lao to guide Soviet supply aircraft into one or more landing strips during inclement weather. Unbeknownst to the Americans, the North Vietnamese had begun moving antiaircraft artillery onto the Plain of Jars, and it was one of these weapons that scored direct hits on Rose Bowl. Because Bailey already had a parachute strapped to him, he was able to exit the aircraft before it broke up and crashed. His parachute brought him safely to earth, but he sustained serious injuries, including a broken left arm and badly bruised feet and legs. He was unable to walk and decided to hail the first human beings he saw on the ground, hoping they were friendly. They were not, and Bailey began his seventeen months of captivity in Laos.

This book is Bailey’s story, as told to professional writer Ron Martz. Bailey describes his ordeals at the hands of Kong Le’s forces that captured him, with Vietnamese doctors who treated his injuries, and as a prisoner of the Pathet Lao. He was not tortured or used for propaganda purposes (p. xviii). Instead, he was stripped of everything he owned and held in solitary confinement for more than a year. This isolation
was devastating to him, confining him to the “cold dark void” of his cell. He “fought with time every day, trying not to be overwhelmed by its enormity and praying for something to happen that would speed its passage” (p. xviii). For strength, he har- kened back to his upbringing in Waycross, Georgia, the independence and self- sufficiency he developed while living apart from his divorced father and mother, and the role model set for him by his grandfather, whose sense of fairness, work ethic, and devotion to family and faith contributed to the inner strength necessary for Bailey to endure solitary existence in faraway Laos.

The book is no emotional dump, nor does one see the slightest sign of self-pity. Rather, one detects the straightforward reporting of a brave soldier. Bailey’s narrative is interrupted from time to time by flashbacks to previous experiences: his entry into the Army, aviation school, his introduction to B-17s and eventually the B-29, which destined him for wartime service in the Pacific, where he participated in the bombing of Tokyo. Bailey left the Army but returned when he yielded to an overwhelming desire to fly. He earned his second set of aviation wings and became an “artillery officer who happened to fly airplanes” (p. 46). An assignment to Korea brought him back to Asia and eventually to Vientiane.

Bailey intersperses his narrative with personal views on political and foreign policy issues that emerged during his interesting career, including those associated with the Korean War and events leading up to U.S. involvement in the armed conflict in Laos. He was in Vientiane when Kong Le staged an attempted putsch and during the turbulent times when various local forces were at war. But he recovers the narrative of his captivity and stays with it until the point of his release in August 1962. Bailey describes his transfer to the Philippines and eventually to Walter Reed Hospital in Washington, DC, where President John F. Kennedy was present when Bailey was awarded the Bronze Star for valor.

Bailey’s intelligent analysis of how his captivity affected his life back in the United States is both tragic and instructive. He faults the Army for being insufficiently sensitive to his desperate need to avoid ever being separated from his family again. His numerous, frequent transfers contributed to his eventual divorce. He also emphasizes that U.S. attention shifted by the mid-1960s almost exclusively to North and South Vietnam. “The POWs in Laos disappeared behind a nearly impenetrable shield of secrecy, soldiers of an invisible army and casualties of a war the government denied was being fought (p. 176).” Here, in an important chapter entitled “Soldiers of the Unreturning Army,” Bailey’s narrative will capture even the most seasoned student of special warfare. Because of the secrecy surrounding almost everything the United States was doing in Laos, that battlefield remains an “unfathomable black hole” into which many U.S. servicemen disappeared, and only a small number of prisoners returned (p. 181). Those of us who fought in Laos and lost comrades who are still officially listed as missing in action know exactly what he means.

A foreword by Newt Gingrich, the former speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, concludes with the observation that all America owes a debt of gratitude to its men and women in uniform and that this debt is “even greater to those who, through no fault of their own, have found themselves captives of the enemy, but have
kept their faith with God, their country and themselves. . . . These men are heroes” (p. xv).

Bailey’s account of his capture, incarceration, and release was confirmed to me in a July 2003 letter from Captain Michael McGrath (USN, ret.), the historian of NAM-POWs Corporation, a non-profit veterans’ organization that is the most reliable source of information about American prisoners of war.


Reviewed by Grace Cheng, Hawaii Pacific University

When most Americans speak of the “Vietnam War,” they are referring to the U.S. military’s entanglement in Vietnam from 1965 to 1975, typically placing it in the fully developed context of Cold War politics. However, for the modern Vietnamese nation, that war was part of a 30-year struggle for national liberation that began in 1945 with the Viet Minh-led resistance against the return of French colonial rule following World War II. Most of the chapters in *The First Vietnam War: Colonial Conflict and Cold War Crisis* cover the 1945–1954 war, emphasizing the shifting political landscape shaped by key players in the Indochina crisis during those years. Some of the chapters actually do deal with the post–1954 period, and the grouping of the chapters into strict chronological order after a section containing two historiographical studies would have benefited from more astute editing to draw together the common insights offered by the chapters. Nevertheless, the volume presents some valuable material that, rather than treating the Franco–Viet Minh War as the beginning of U.S. involvement in Vietnam, suggests the underdetermined nature of the postwar order. Escaping the binary logic of Cold War politics in favor of elaborating on the complexity and contingencies of international politics in the early postwar period, many of the volume’s contributors draw on recently released archival material to present the various scenarios of the postwar order envisioned by the critical actors concerned with Indochina—scenarios that reflected the actors’ disparate values and anxieties, as well as complex interests and calculations.

Several chapters highlight the significance of the waning of empire and the emboldened anti-colonial resistance elsewhere in the world for Indochina, as it shifted from being the site of colonial conflict to that of Cold War ideological struggle. Chapters by Mark Lawrence, Martin Thomas, and Laurent Cesari demonstrate how Franklin Roosevelt’s goal of decolonization clashed immediately after World War II with French and British anxieties about the postwar recovery of their economies, which were deeply tied to their colonies in Asia. By 1949, however, the persistence of the Viet Minh insurgency was diverting increasing amounts of resources that the Europeans believed were better served elsewhere. Cesari further illustrates how, despite initial
U.S. opposition to the return of French rule to Vietnam, France was able to exploit the complex array of international concerns in the postwar period—including developments in East Asia and the consolidation of West European defense against the USSR—to bargain for U.S. support of its war in Indochina, even as popular support for the war in France itself had faded by 1950.

In other chapters, differences not only among individual states but also within them lend to the book’s theme of the highly contingent nature of the postwar international order. Aiming to illustrate the multifarious currents in the divided politics of the 1945–1954 period, Mark Philip Bradley surveys a puzzling variety of texts from six different countries about or from the period, including literary studies, paintings, a range of histories about state actors and social movements, and official publications. Bradley overextends in attempting to capture in one chapter the full range of discourses through which different subjects mediated their experiences during those years. Stein Tønneson and Marilyn Young take the more conventional narrative approach of describing the individuals and events that contributed to the demise of Roosevelt’s policy toward Indochina. Tønneson’s and Young’s chapters illuminate various dimensions of the context in which U.S. policy shifted toward recognition of French sovereignty over Indochina and support for its war against the Viet Minh. The chapters reveal the construction of Cold War logic, as the Vietnamese resistance, which the United States initially regarded as an anti-colonial movement, was recast as Communist expansionism by the U.S. State Department, the U.S. minister in Saigon, French General Jean de Lattre de Tassigny and the U.S. popular media.

Other chapters suggest that U.S. involvement in Indochina in one form or other was inevitable, as not even Roosevelt, who supported self-determination for the colonies, was willing to allow for independence without some interference from the more “advanced” countries of the West. Young and Andrew Rotter point out the Orientalist and racist characterizations of the Vietnamese that typified American perspectives and translated into calls for Western tutelage until the Vietnamese “evolved” politically. Against such characterizations, David Marr demonstrates North Vietnam’s admirable attempt to construct defense capability in order to assert sovereignty over its territory, despite the uncertain conditions of its international status with the presence of Republican Chinese forces in the region, the lack of international support for the self-proclaimed state of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV), and France’s impending return as colonial power. Marr credits Ho Chi Minh’s astute observation of international politics and emphasis on diplomacy for overcoming the challenges of consolidating DRV authority over armed units. William Duiker also notes Ho’s restraint and describes how he played a “more significant role in formulating the Vietnamese version of people’s war than is usually assumed” (p. 153). Chen Jian, too, stresses the role of diplomacy at the 1954 Geneva Conference, focusing on the role of Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai in pushing through a negotiated agreement in 1954, thereby ending the First Vietnam War and avoiding direct U.S. military intervention, at least for the time being.

The final two chapters of the book deal with the United States in South Vietnam after 1954. Kathryn C. Statler discusses how U.S. efforts to supplant France in the
South contributed to the failure to carry out national elections in 1956, which France had originally agreed to in good faith at Geneva in the hope of decisively ending the military conflict with the Viet Minh. Ultimately, it was to Hanoi’s detriment that France was not able to maintain control in the South through 1956 and that Diem was able to stay in power. But the source of Diem’s demise would be Washington itself, as he became increasingly independent. Although Dwight Eisenhower initially gave an open-ended commitment to Diem’s government, the fundamental U.S. goal was to construct a reliably pro-American regime in Saigon, even if that required overbearing U.S. involvement in the affairs of the South Vietnamese state, much to Diem’s irritation. As Statler describes, from 1957 Diem began to see France as a counterweight to the U.S. presence, and France continued to promote its influence through culture and under Charles De Gaulle inspired a common resistance to the hegemonic politics of the Soviet Union and the United States.

In the volume’s final chapter, Andrew Rotter addresses the Johnson administration’s efforts to craft a rationale for direct U.S. military intervention in Vietnam, despite the lack of public support in the United States for such action. Rotter argues that when Lyndon Johnson decided to intervene in the conflict with military force, all of the factors that deterred Roosevelt from becoming involved in Vietnam in 1945 went unheeded. As in 1945, U.S. decision-makers and the American public in the 1960s remained contemptuous of the Vietnamese as a “race” and ignorant of Vietnamese society.

The American understanding of Vietnam remains elusive today, and some Western scholars still study Vietnam through an Orientalist lens. However, this may in part be attributed to the restrictive policy on release of information, including information of primarily scholarly interest, still rigidly enforced by Hanoi. Although many of the insights offered by this book’s contributors about the international dimensions of the “First Vietnam War” are derived from archival material made available since the end of the Cold War, the Vietnamese account remains muddled and limited to secondary literature of an official nature, which Lien-Hanh T. Nguyen surveys in her chapter. Nguyen looks at two journals, as well as textbooks from various periods, for official representations of the war. The depictions varied in relation to the propaganda supporting the Vietnamese-American War, the Sino-Khmer-Vietnamese conflict, or Vietnam’s post-1986 reforms. In each period, the official Vietnamese interpretation of the Franco–Viet Minh War has been filtered through Hanoi’s anxieties about the challenges it faced at the time of publication, rather than for the purpose of historical accuracy. Therefore, Nguyen’s exhortation that this secondary literature be taken seriously is not terribly compelling, but then neither is the material she is dealing with.

Reviewed by Yafeng Xia, Long Island University, Brooklyn

Over the last twenty years, the study of U.S.-China relations during the Cold War has developed significantly. Two main factors have spurred this progress: the steady opening and declassification of large collections of archival sources in both the United States and China, and the growing academic collaboration between Chinese and American scholars. In October 1986, scholars from both China and the United States met for the first time in Beijing to discuss Sino-American relations from 1945 to 1955.

In 1995, the Center of International Strategic Research of the Central Party School of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) entered into a collaborative research project on the study of U.S.-China relations during the Cold War with the John King Fairbank Center for East Asian Research at Harvard University in holding international conferences and publishing research results. Over the past decade, they have held three conferences and published three collections of conference papers in Chinese, two of which have also been published in English. The first English-language volume—Robert S. Ross and Jiang Changbin, eds., Re-examining the Cold War: U.S.-China Diplomacy, 1954–1973 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2001)—dealt with U.S.-China confrontation and hostilities from 1954 to 1972. The second English-language volume, under review here, focuses on U.S.-China reconciliation and normalization from 1969 to 1979.

Normalization of U.S.-China Relations is a great effort to produce an international history by using newly available sources from Chinese, American, and former Soviet archives. Although two of the three editors are Americans, the authors of the eight essays include four from mainland China and one each from Canada, Great Britain, Russia, and Taiwan. The multiple perspectives of the authors underscore the value of an international history.

The Taiwan issue, which has figured prominently in U.S.-China relations since the outbreak of the Korean War, receives much attention in this volume, with four chapters focusing mainly on the Taiwan issue during the period of U.S.-China rapprochement (1971–1972) and normalization (1979). Although the U.S. negotiators believed that they had made the minimal concessions necessary to achieve normalization, scholars have reached no consensus about this issue. Gong Li and Robert Accinelli maintain that Chinese leaders consistently opposed official U.S.-Taiwan contacts following normalization and would not have agreed to the closer ties on any other terms, whereas Rosemary Foot contends that “there might have been more flexibility” in the U.S. position than “U.S. officials believed at the time” (p. 115). Making use of the Nixon Presidential Materials Project and Foreign Ministry Archives of the Republic of China, Joanne Chang’s essay explores the impact of the U.S.-China rapprochement and normalization on Taiwan. Chang shows that Taiwan, because of
its complete dependence on the United States for its security, could do little more than passively observe U.S. diplomacy.

Each of the four other chapters deals with one particular aspect of the larger topic. Making use of a large array of Chinese and foreign sources, including documents from China’s provincial archives and Railway Administration Archives, Li Danhui offers a new perspective in examining the role of Vietnam in the Sino-American rapprochement process from late 1968 to 1973. Li Jie makes an effort to explore how China’s domestic politics affected U.S.-China relations from 1969 to 1979. Wang Zhongchun offers a military perspective on how the shared perception of a Soviet threat spurred U.S.-China normalization from 1969 to 1979. Using recently available documents from the Russian archives, Vitaly Kozyrev examines the Soviet Union’s reaction to the U.S.-China reconciliation and Moscow’s abortive efforts to undermine the closer U.S.-China ties.

As is inevitable when dealing with subjects so complex and sensitive, the reader is likely to find flaws or points of disagreement. The essays by Li Jie, Gong Li, and Wang Zhongchun represent more of the CCP party line and the official narrative of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) than serious and independent academic research. Gong in his essay eagerly criticizes the United States for the “stagnation” in U.S.-China relations without any effort to explore possible errors and missteps in China’s and Mao Zedong’s policies (pp. 126–127). Wang Zhongchun heaps blame on the United States for not accepting China’s “horizontal line” strategy but makes no serious evaluation of the validity of such a policy. As Wang claims, “the U.S. policy of détente toward the Soviet Union became the main obstacle to improvement of China-U.S. relations” (pp. 156–157).

Li Jie’s essay is the most disappointing of all. Li, a noted official historian at the Department for Research on Party Documents of the CCP Central Committee, hews rigidly to the party line and official narrative. Li’s argument that Lin Biao opposed Mao’s and Zhou Enlai’s efforts to reach out to the United States adds nothing new to what we have already known. Li’s contention that “Lin Biao and his supporters were preparing their own assessment of the international situation” while the four marshals were proposing U.S.-China rapprochement and that Lin’s “strategic ideas were quite different from those of Mao” (p. 60) is misleading. In reality, only Mao, Zhou, the four marshals, and their two assistants—Xiong Xianghui, a high-ranking intelligence and Foreign Service officer; and Yao Guang, the director-general of the Foreign Ministry’s Department of European and American Affairs—knew about the study group. There is no evidence at all that Lin Biao was informed or aware of the marshals’ assignment. (For more on this issue, see Yafeng Xia, “China’s Elite Politics and Sino-American Rapprochement, January 1969—February 1972,” Journal of Cold War Studies, Vol. 8, No. 4 Fall 2006, pp. 3–28.)

Li cites as evidence Mao’s accusation against Lin Biao to U.S. President Richard Nixon when Nixon was at Mao’s study in February 1972 (p. 61). This is also farfetched. We now know that the political setback Zhou Enlai suffered in late 1973 amid criticism of his handling of the Sino-U.S. talks was due to Mao Zedong’s machinations (p. 71). Mao was the culprit, and his wife, Jiang Qing, was only a dog biting
whomever the chairman wanted. It is still taboo for scholars in mainland China to write and publish on sensitive foreign policy issues, especially any criticism of the PRC government’s foreign policy errors and misjudgments in general and Mao’s and Zhou’s blunders in particular. The slowness of declassification of documents in China and the inaccessibility of the central CCP archives to ordinary researchers continue to pose a serious hindrance to Chinese scholars’ quest to illuminate U.S.-China relations during the Cold War.

Despite the book’s flaws and its failure to live up to expectations, it is the best collection of essays available on this topic in both China and the United States. It is a significant contribution to the study of U.S.-China relations that can serve as a supplementary text for courses on modern diplomatic history, contemporary China, U.S.-China relations, and U.S.–East Asia relations.


Reviewed by Warren I. Cohen, University of Maryland, Baltimore County, and Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars

James Peck has written a thoughtful, interesting book that would have been a provocative and valuable contribution to the debate over policy toward China had it been published forty years ago. His central theme is that U.S. government analysts in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s consistently failed to understand Chinese realities and were determined to force China into an American-structured global economy that had no place for a revolutionary socialist regime. He raises useful questions about how ideology works in the national security bureaucracy and writes persuasively about the tendency of U.S. officials during the Cold War to blur the line between Communism and radical nationalism in the Third World.

Peck begins with a revival of the “lost chance in China” argument to which many of us contributed in the 1960s and 1970s, contending that the U.S. government wasted an opportunity to win friends in Beijing in the late 1940s. Unfortunately, this interpretation of Chinese-American relations during those years has been debunked by evidence to the contrary from Chinese and American sources. Peck ignores most of the work of Chinese scholars and cherry-picks from the work of their Western counterparts.

Chinese scholars, Chen Jian and Michael Sheng in particular, have insisted that Mao was not interested in good relations with the United States, substantiating the contention of Steve Goldstein in 1978 to which Peck takes exception in his endnotes. Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, among others, has documented the determination of the Truman administration to abandon Taiwan and seek accommodation with the People’s Republic of China (PRC)—rather than making Taiwan the “linchpin” of Washington’s containment policy. We now have ample evidence that the Truman adminis-
tration was preparing to recognize Beijing in 1950—evidence that Peck chooses to ignore rather than refute.

Could Americans have been more sensitive, tried harder? Of course. Would a kinder, gentler American approach to Beijing have brought happier results? Tucker and Michael Hunt still think it might have. Chinese scholars do not; nor did any of the other participants in the symposium I edited for *Diplomatic History* in 1997.

Peck’s contention that the Eisenhower administration did not attempt to improve relations with the PRC after the Korean War is plausible. Certainly the administration did not take advantage of possible opportunities, despite the president’s public insistence that it was wrong to isolate China. But the United States did do more than Peck acknowledges, specifically in the economic arena that appears to be his ultimate concern. He ignores the evidence presented by Qing Simei in “The Eisenhower Administration and Changes in Western Embargo Policy against China, 1954–1958,” in Warren I. Cohen and Akira Iriye, eds., *The Great Powers in East Asia: 1953–1960* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), pp. 101–124, a volume Peck cites for his own purposes. Qing points out some of the ways Dwight Eisenhower circumvented the supporters of Jiang Jieshi (Chiang Kai-shek) to permit subsidiaries of U.S. corporations to trade with China. Eisenhower also overcame resistance within his administration and allowed both Great Britain and Japan to ease the sanction regime in their trade with the PRC. Chinese intentions in the 1950s remain unclear. Would Mao have been more receptive to U.S. overtures in the mid-1950s? Some Chinese archival material is now becoming available, and we may know more once scholars have combed it.

Peck has done an excellent job of finding and analyzing U.S. government documents that support his argument—although he does less well when discussing the 1960s, for which he offers some of the brilliant memoranda written by Jim Thomson, but tells us little about the intentions of either John F. Kennedy or Lyndon Johnson. Noting the acceptance by the national security bureaucracy of the “containment without isolation” concept—an important move away from the policies of the 1950s and early 1960s—he shifts his focus to economic issues, preparing the ground for a critique of globalization.

Peck seems nostalgic for the radical nationalism of Third World leaders of the 1960s, as opposed to modernization theory. He is surely correct when he contends that those promoting “modernization,” such as Walt Rostow, were counterrevolutionaries seeking to strengthen American capitalism and to create a global market system in which the United States would thrive. His contention that the goal of the Johnson administration was to draw China into the list of modernizing states, away from revolutionary socialism, is fascinating, but probably overestimates the foresight of the president and his senior aides.

The book’s greatest weaknesses are a lack of command of the secondary sources that might have led Peck to a more balanced account and a refusal to recognize that China was an active rather than passive participant in the development of the Chinese-American relationship. In his introduction, Peck notes that U.S. leaders were less
interested in understanding the world than in organizing it in the interests of the United States. Were Chinese leaders any different?

Most striking is the facileness with which Peck slides over the horrors and sheer brutality of Mao Zedong’s despotic rule and the impact of the Great Leap Forward and the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution on U.S. policymakers as well as on the Great Helmsman’s immediate victims. Peck decrives the American image in the 1960s of a hostile, revolutionary China that might become a military opponent. But the fact is that China was deeply hostile to the United States—and was revolutionary. Was it really unreasonable to think of China as a potential military adversary?

Washington’s China is reminiscent of some of the best work of the New Left years ago when we were all still young and the best among us were enraged by the war in Vietnam. I wish it had been written then. Today its arguments seem tired and are unsustainable in the face of scholarship produced by Chinese as well as American scholars over the last quarter of a century.


Reviewed by Richard J. Aldrich, University of Warwick

Spying on Science is one of the most impressive studies of Cold War intelligence to have emerged in many years. Although the book’s main focus is scientific intelligence, its scope is far wider, offering a reliable and remarkably detailed picture of intelligence activity in Germany prior to the creation of the Berlin Wall in 1961. Maddrell’s study makes use of a wide range of documents, including the relevant presidential files. However, its main strength lies in the painstaking analysis of two important archives: first, the records of the Scientific and Technical Intelligence Bureau, a revealing body of material concerning operational aspects of postwar Western espionage; second, the records of the Ministry of State Security (MfS, or Stasi) of the former German Democratic Republic (GDR), which offer a fascinating insight into Communist counterespionage work against the agents of the West. Each judgment in the book is carefully weighed, and each proposition is supported by meticulous use of evidence. In short, Spying on Science is a model study of intelligence activity.

Maddrell correctly asserts that the first decade after the Second World War witnessed a quantum leap in weapons technology. Although most historians associate 1945 with the arrival of nuclear weapons, developments in chemical weapons such as nerve gas and in biological warfare agents such as brucella were also highly significant. These developments were paralleled by novel forms of delivery, including ballistic missiles. Military disciplines such as electronic warfare, including radar and electronic countermeasures, also blossomed. By 1945, leading states had already concluded that no physical defense against some of these weapons would be feasible and were shifting
to a strategic philosophy of deterrence. They resolved to devote enormous resources to scientific espionage in order to probe this fantastic new field that framed the conflict between East and West.

The key intelligence battleground was Germany because the border between East and West there remained porous at some points, notably Berlin. Collection by the many intelligence agencies of the United States, Britain, the Federal Republic Germany (FRG), and other allies was conducted on an industrial scale. The foot soldiers in this espionage war were mostly Germans. Initially, the most interesting human subjects were those traveling to the West—defectors, refugees, and former prisoners of war (POWs) returning from Soviet-controlled areas to the Western zones—and they were debriefed and interrogated en masse. The East German scientific program was undermined when leading scientists and engineers were induced to defect to the West. Remarkably, some German POWs and former German scientists were retained by the East until 1955 and were often employed in sensitive locations. After fleeing to the FRG, they provided information on locations such as uranium factories, which Western intelligence had found hard to locate, never mind infiltrate with agents.

In parallel to the large programs for “wringing out” material from returnees, the two sides engaged in an agent war on a vast scale. Until 1955, the espionage agencies of the occupying powers were actually funded by occupation costs, giving both the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the British MI6 an additional incentive to build up huge stations in Germany. They obtained excellent intelligence and penetrated the GDR on a wide scale. Equally, the notorious Stasi was aware of this effort and devoted considerable resources to counterintelligence. For the West, the most serious problem was the aggressive high-level penetration of Western intelligence organizations. Information provided by double agents such as Heinz Felfe and George Blake resulted in the deaths of many Western agents in the late 1950s. The CIA worked with the NTS Russian Émigré organization in Germany which was also extensively penetrated by the Soviet Union.

Maddrell’s coverage of the security operations in East Germany is enthralling. Often guided by information from figures such as Blake, the Stasi launched several major operations against Western spies and resistance operatives in 1953–1955. The largest was “Operation Blitz,” which ran from December 1954 to the spring of 1955 and netted no less than 521 suspects. Of these, 188 were claimed to be working for the Americans, 105 for the British, and 100 for the West Germans. MI6 lost five networks to this single Stasi operation. The era of human espionage drew to a close in 1961 with the building of the Berlin Wall, which made free access to the East less straightforward and forced the intelligence agencies to make more use of radios to communicate with their agents, thus increasing their vulnerability. By the mid-1960s the West was making more use of technical means and also semi-overt collectors such as the military missions to keep a watch on the Group of Soviet Forces in Germany.

This book has important arguments to make about the relative success and failure of the clandestine efforts of both East and West, as well as observations about the impact of scientific intelligence on wider policy, including the arms race. Maddrell suggests that the intelligence war in Germany allowed Britain to work as a key partner
of the United States, slowing its relative decline as an intelligence power. More im-
portantly perhaps, Maddrell argues that the intelligence war in Germany reveals an aspect
of Western policy that was more aggressive than we had suspected, echoing arguments
advanced in recent studies by Scott Lucas, Gregory Mitrovich, and others. Readers are
also left in no doubt that the Cold War was a cruel war. Many agents were recruited by
the West in the knowledge that their life in this work would probably be short. If they
were captured, the East did not hesitate to deal with them ruthlessly, in some cases
making use of the guillotine.


Reviewed by Helga Haftendorn, Free University of Berlin

The author of this book, Otis C. Mitchell, is a professor emeritus of history at the
University of Cincinnati who worked as a young soldier from 1957 to 1959 at the
Bremerhaven Field Office of the U.S. Army Counterintelligence Corps in Germany.
Intelligence and counterintelligence were at their height in this period between the
outbreak of the Korean War and the construction of the Berlin Wall. Mitchell’s book
should thus profit from both the expertise of a seasoned history teacher and the first-
hand experience of an intelligence analyst.

Mitchell’s background somewhat explains the setup of the book. Part I, con-
sisting of chapters one through eight, gives an account of the evolution of Russian-
American friendship from the Tsarist regime through the Soviet period, all the way to
the advent of détente. In this factional history, the author sides with the “indigenous
school” of Russian studies that attributes the rise and demise of the Soviet Union to
long-term internal factors. Additional footnoted detail is given in three case studies
(called “interpolations”)—on the Berlin airlift, the June 1953 uprising in East Ger-
many, and the building of the Berlin Wall. I suspect the author drew on articles he had
written earlier. The general emphasis of this rather superficial and occasionally faulty
account is on the most important international events. Some facts are slanted, names
misspelled (Ruhrgebiet, Groteswohl Plan, etc.) and the copyediting and formatting are
 sloppy.

A new section of the book begins with chapter 7, in which Mitchell tries to ex-
plain how and why the Cold War came about. He starts with a behavioral interpreta-
tion of Communism and of American civilization and continues by detailing the post-
1945 intentions of the Soviet Union and United States, concentrating on their diver-
gent worldviews. This analysis provides the background for a second cut at Cold War
history, this time focusing on major developments such as the Truman Doctrine, the
Marshall Plan, and the integration of West Germany into the North Atlantic Treaty
Organization (NATO). This section, however, is as cursory as the first part and lacks
any references. The whole section is therefore of little use to the advanced student or
the history teacher looking for references to major works used and documents available, either in the original or in one of the major collections listed in the bibliography. The book also would have been better if Mitchell had drawn on non-U.S. publications, many of which are available in English translations.

The third part of the book, starting with chapter 16 and titled “West Berlin and Germany: The Intelligence Battle Ground,” covers the period from the beginning of the occupation to the building of the Berlin wall. Mitchell deals with the two sides’ mutual misunderstandings of their political intentions and takes a third cut at the evolution of the Cold War. Chapters 19–21 then describe the formation of the East German intelligence establishment and the corresponding Western activities. Although this part does contain bibliographic references, including some to newly released U.S. Central Intelligence Agency documents, the whole section, like the other parts of the book, lacks originality.

Mitchell has missed a great opportunity to merge his reading of the historical literature on the Cold War with his experience as an intelligence analyst. An account of this crucial period in German history as seen through the eyes of an intelligence analyst detailing his work would have been fascinating. Too bad.


Reviewed by Gottfried Niedhart, Mannheim University

Most historians feel obliged to divide the narrative flow of history into distinct segments with clear beginnings and ends. Historians of the East-West conflict also take this approach. A consensus seems to have emerged that the East-West conflict that shaped the world during most of the second half of the twentieth century forms an integrated whole, which we call the Cold War. Cold War studies, with distinguished scholarly journals, are booming on both sides of the Atlantic. The book under review here is a product of the well-established Cold War Studies Centre at the London School of Economics and is published in its Cold War History Series.

The topic of Arne Hofmann’s slim and solid study is, however, not the Cold War but the endeavor to overcome the Cold War by making life in Berlin somewhat easier and by containing the danger of a hot war between the superpowers. Focusing on Berlin and Cuba as the two major flashpoints during the dangerous, crisis-ridden years from 1958 onward, Hofmann discusses the roles of two protagonists of a significant change in East-West relations: Willy Brandt, the governing mayor of West Berlin starting in 1957, and U.S. President John F. Kennedy. Both Brandt and Kennedy argued that a lessening of tensions between East and West was imperative. Both were convinced that by improving East-West communications and by curbing sterile Cold War propaganda, the West would not run any serious risk. On the contrary, turning from Cold War confrontation to some sort of cooperative antagonism would
be to the advantage of the West in a medium-range perspective. In other words, détente had to take the place of the old Cold War approach to the East-West conflict.

Hofmann describes how the concept of Ostpolitik was developed in West Berlin (and not in Bonn) and how détente emerged in Europe (but not only in Europe). Although he is aware of the methodological problem of reducing the political concept of détente to the Brandt-Kennedy relationship, his effort to reconstruct as closely as possible the exchange of views between Brandt and Kennedy during the brief time they worked together makes perfect sense. By the time of Kennedy’s assassination in November 1963, “détente was on the international agenda” (p. 4).

In the first and largest part of the book (pp. 9–98) Hofmann presents a thoroughly researched narrative of Brandt’s and Kennedy’s interaction, which ended up in the “Brandt-Kennedy alliance and the first steps towards détente” (p. 75). The story is one of impulses from both sides, of mutual influences and adaptations, a story that depicts Brandt as an increasingly “independent” actor who “finally overtook the Americans with an Ostpolitik confidently conducted by Germans in an attempt to take charge of the German cause themselves” (p. 181). Of course, it is not only a story of these two leaders. Sometimes and inevitably Egon Bahr turns up, partly as Brandt’s closest associate, partly as the man who, allegedly, did not share Brandt’s transatlantic orientation. The Brandt-Bahr duo was not only a challenge for the federal government in Bonn, but also for many people in the Social Democratic Party (SPD). The internal debate in the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) about West German–U.S. relations is covered in the third part of the book (pp. 153–174), which should have been incorporated into the first part.

The book’s middle part is devoted to the underlying assumptions of Ostpolitik à la Brandt and Bahr and to Kennedy’s expectations about the function of détente. Hofmann hints at different schools of thought within the SPD. This is not his actual concern, however, and it is a tricky subject because a history of the Social Democratic discourse on the complex, overlapping themes of the German question, integration into the West, and policy toward the East has still to be written. Focusing on Brandt, Hofmann succinctly analyzes the dynamic elements of the future chancellor’s grand design. Similar to the bridge-building concept embraced by President Lyndon Johnson and Secretary of State Dean Rusk during their period in office, Brandt and Bahr aimed at the gradual transformation of the East. Surprisingly, Hofmann does not dwell on this West German–American parallelism. Instead he jumps from Berlin to Bonn, from the policy of small steps in Berlin to the Ostpolitik of the Social Democratic–Liberal coalition government that took office in 1969. On the one hand, it is a truism that “the making of the European détente of the early 1970s cannot be understood without the origins of détente in the early 1960s” (p. 176). On the other hand, Hofmann readily admits that the early 1960s were only one “phase in an overarching process of policy formation” (p. 176). The “overarching process” continued, in particular, when Brandt became foreign minister in late 1966. The first phase of the supposedly “new” Ostpolitik started then, and there was no “delay of six years” (p. 176).

A problem of terminology remains to be mentioned. According to Hofmann, the Ostpolitik of the 1970s achieved a “European Cold War settlement” (p. 179). Did the
settlement mean that the Cold War simply changed to a more bearable form of conflict but otherwise went on? Or did it mean that the Cold War was transformed into a different form of the East-West conflict? Hofmann’s findings indicate that the term “Cold War” requires both limitation and further precision. The Cold War can be defined as a specific form of the East-West conflict. It was followed by a new form of the East-West conflict starting in the early 1960s, when step-by-step détente emerged, as Hofmann convincingly demonstrates. Furthermore, the crisis of détente during the late 1970s and early 1980s did not lead back to the Cold War of the “long” 1950s. From the mid-1960s through the late 1970s, the East-West conflict was not solved, but the Cold War came to an end. By that point, according to British Prime Minister Edward Heath, a new challenge had arisen. In September 1971 he wrote to Brandt reassuring him that the Western alliance “can stand the strains of détente as it has survived the rest of the Cold War.”


Reviewed by Andrew C. Janos, University of California at Berkeley

In the prefatory words of János Rainer, one of the editors, this volume addresses the “concept of the Sixties” (p. 4), a watershed decade that divides the twentieth century not just in a chronological but also in a social, cultural, and political sense. Thus, as Rainer correctly points out, the decade was one of portentous developments not only in Western Europe and the United States but also in the Soviet bloc, in China, and in the Third World, where colonialism was being replaced by independence and nation building.

This somewhat eclectic collection of essays explores the topic in one of the countries of the Soviet bloc. In addition to Rainer’s illuminating introduction, the volume contains seven chapters. Four of them (by Gábor Kovacs, Melinda Kalmár, György Péteri, and Zsuzsánna Varga) explore a decade of change in what the title designates the “high politics” of the Communist party and the intellectual class. The remaining chapters (by Tibor Valuch, Eszter Tóth, and Sándor Horváth) are historiography from the perspective of average men and women, “the lower classes” of Communist Hungary.

In the first group, Varga’s chapter revisits the ups and downs of economic reform, from its timid beginnings in 1958 to the inception of the New Economic Mechanism in 1968 and beyond. This topic is well known and over the years has commanded a voluminous literature. Varga presents this literature by showing the grudging, step-by-step acceptance of the market principle of operation with the creation of a price structure to reflect production costs and the introduction of profitability as the criterion for
assessing enterprise performance. By now we know that these reforms were subverted early on, partly by the retention of subsidies to politically strategic enterprises, partly by rigidly applied full-employment constraints.

Culture, both high and low, is covered in two chapters. The essay by Kovács discusses the intellectual impact of Western writers such as Herbert Marcuse, Theodore Roszak, and Alain Touraine, coupled with the rediscovery of the “young Marx” and the broader applicability of early Marxist thought to capitalism as well as socialism. The chapter by Kalmár depicts the mundane efforts of the authorities to bring publishing and entertainment in line with new political priorities as well as market principles. Perhaps the most engaging essay of the group, indeed of the whole collection, is by György Péteri, on what T. H. Rigby once memorably labeled “crypto-politics,” the manipulation of organizational restraints, and feigned compliance with organizational purposes to undermine the authority of rivals and superiors. In what amounts to a case study of this phenomenon, Péteri gives us an account of the “MEGÉV affair” (p. 98) in which the management of a large machine-building company resorts to carefully planted innuendo in the party press as part of a larger battle of conservatives and reformers.

In the second group of essays, Valuch describes the drudgery of farm life and the painfully slow rise in the quantity and size of rural housing, and Tóth tells us about the role of “flats, gardens, [and] oranges” (p. 160) in the reward system of a society still characterized by widespread scarcity of material goods. The final chapter, by Horváth, on youth culture in post-1956 Hungary, highlights the fusion of the symbolic mimicking of Western consumerism with the proliferation of youth gangs expressing their identity in various forms of hooliganism. Here the contrast between the 1950s and the 1960s seems exaggerated. Anyone with personal recollections of those now distant decades will remember that both forms of self-search and expression were as much part of the earlier period as of the later.

Read one by one, the essays pass muster as Alltagsgeschichte. But as a collection they are less successful, especially when viewed through the lens of social science more focused on the tasks of concept formation and explanation by inductive analogizing. If we compare the experience of East and West (not to speak of Third World anti-colonialism and China’s anti-bureaucratic Cultural Revolution) in the “Sixties,” the differences will be far more conspicuous than the similarities. Whereas in the West the 1960s were the product of the sudden rediscovery of an old truth that prosperity comes with a price, in the Soviet bloc reformism was driven by the desire to catch up with this very source of Western turmoil. Because that goal required a modicum of personal autonomy and governmental restraint, the ideas of the cultural revolution in the West just “chanced to slip under the Iron Curtain” (p. 6). If so, there is room for other conferences and volumes on the impact of the more organic cultural revolutions of the West (and, indeed, of China) on the Soviet bloc, or, more ambitiously, on the obvious contrasts yet puzzling coincidences of turmoil in the world at this particular historical juncture.

Reviewed by Martin Dimitrov, Dartmouth College

This translation gives Anglophone readers access to an important study originally published in French in 1999. Claude Lefort takes up several difficult questions in his book—why Communism arose, how it was maintained, and why it eventually collapsed. Answering these questions is not easy, and Lefort explicitly argues against simplistic explanations of the emergence, existence, and demise of Communism. He advocates *complicating* Communism—in other words, he rejects linear explanations and stresses the importance of multicausality for understanding the fate of Communism.

What was the basis of Communist rule? Lefort takes exception to some of the standard answers to this question. In contrast to studies that emphasize the ideological (Martin Malia) or illusory (François Furet) aspects of Communism, Lefort believes that we can understand Communist regimes only by examining the creation of a well-organized and totalizing Communist party. Individual citizens entered the party not because of a deep belief in Communism, but because the party gave them the best opportunity at furthering their life chances. Lefort argues that individuals engaged in “voluntary servitude” (a term borrowed from Étienne de La Boétie), which means that they voluntarily subjugated their will to that of the Communist party. Individuals “believed” in the party, but this belief was strategic rather than ideological—they joined the party and then allowed the party to direct their lives and worldviews.

Were lofty ideals like accountability and legality important to the maintenance of Communist regimes? In contrast to Raymond Aron, Lefort maintains that although the Soviet Union had elections and constitutions, both were used solely as instruments for the justification of the ultimate control of the Communist party over individuals. Lefort takes Hannah Arendt’s interest in the role of law in totalitarian regimes a step further, arguing that laws in the Soviet Union assumed a perverse function of legitimating terror and repression, which were framed in legal terms. In short, Lefort believes that the basis of Communist rule was not ideological, but bureaucratic—the strong presence of a well-organized Communist party was instrumental in maintaining these regimes.

Was Communism reformable? Lefort does not think so. He identifies three problems that eventually brought about the collapse of Communism—the impossibility of maintaining centralized governance, the emergence of bureaucratic rivalries, and the inability of local administrators to force individuals to participate in productive activity. Although attempts were made to reform the system, they ultimately failed because true reform necessitated limiting the party’s total domination and desire to control all levels of society. Given the impossibility of reform, the collapse of Communism was inevitable.

Lefort’s book leaves unexamined three important questions. First, how did the Soviet Union evolve after Josif Stalin? Second, was there diversity within the Communist regimes? Third, why were some Communist regimes able to reform?
Most of Lefort’s study is focused on the classical Communist state: the Soviet Union under Stalin. Although he mentions other periods in Soviet history, he does not provide a detailed analysis of Nikita Khrushchev, Leonid Brezhnev, and Mikhail Gorbachev. His claims would have been strengthened (and, to use his terminology, complicated) if he had traced how his argument about the basis of Communist rule applies to the post-1956 evolution of the Soviet Union. In addition to those temporal extensions, Lefort’s argument can also be tested geographically. Scholars in recent years have emphasized the existence of diverse pathways for the emergence and demise of Communist regimes, and it would have been interesting if Lefort had discussed whether all the East European Communist regimes were maintained in similar ways and whether their collapse was attributable to the same factors that, in his view, explain the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The even more challenging issue that Lefort should have discussed concerns the ability of some Communist regimes to reform successfully and to avert collapse. China demonstrates that reform of Communism, though exceedingly difficult, is possible. After Deng Xiaoping ushered in the Reform and Openness era in 1978, China reformed its economy, and, even more importantly, managed to limit the power of the Communist party over society without weakening its claim to sole political leadership. China now has a market economy, but the Chinese Communist Party is still secure in its rule over the country. This raises several important questions. How was political and economic reform carried out in China? Why did the Soviet Union not try to emulate it? Was the Chinese regime so special that it cannot be compared to the Soviet Union? Analysis of those questions will produce fuller (and more complex) answers to the fundamental puzzles of the emergence and maintenance of Communist regimes that are raised in Lefort’s study.

This is an important book that forces us to rethink a fundamental question of the twentieth century: Why did Communist regimes emerge and why did they fail in most of the countries in which they existed? Lefort does not believe in easy answers, and his book does not provide them. What it offers is more valuable—it presents us several very interesting hypotheses about the basis of Communist rule that can be subjected to empirical tests by scholars of comparative Communism.