
Reviewed by Harris Mylonas, George Washington University

Carole McGranahan has written an important book on the Tibetan resistance in China and the lives of the refugees in Nepal and India, as well as the politics of history and memory. This book is the product of extensive research conducted from 1994 to 2009 in Tibetan refugee communities in India and Nepal. Focusing on the history and politics of the guerrilla army Chushi Gangdrug, McGranahan combines ethnographic and historical material to narrate a history of Tibetan resistance and its complex relationship with Tibetan history, Tibetan culture, and the Dalai Lama.

In the book McGranahan coins the term “arrested histories,” which she uses to reconcile the conflicts between memories of a covert violent past and the official history of nonviolence, between secret links to the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the homegrown nature of the Tibetan resistance, and between the different regional identities and the unitary Tibetan identity forged after the late 1950s.

McGranahan presents a wide range of “arrested” facts and interpretations, including important details about the Dalai Lama’s exit from China, the covert guerrilla operations, the lives of the refugees, and the politics of the community. Although the CIA’s involvement has been covered extensively over the past fifteen years (including in the pages of the JCWS), McGranahan sheds important light on the “arrested” voices of the Tibetan resistance fighters and retired CIA officers she has interviewed. She presents the local perspective rather than just the perspective from Lhasa or the Dalai Lama and a more complex relationship with the Guomindang and the Communists. For instance, we see that some Tibetans collaborated with the Nationalists and others with the Communists. The book also provides a comprehensive account of the involvement of a wide range of actors: India, Nepal, and even Taiwan.

McGranahan weaves together the lives of ordinary Tibetans with the diplomatic and military events in a superb manner—although sometimes this effort makes the text difficult to follow. In a way, McGranahan wants—consciously or subconsciously—to put the day-to-day lives of the fighters and their refugee experiences in India and Nepal on the same plane as the diplomatic maneuvering of elites and geopolitical developments. She provides a portrait of Chushi Gangdrug’s place in the overall geopolitical picture while at the same time illuminating the internal dynamics—including disputes over the chain of command, the important regional
cleavages that existed, and the tensions between the resistance and the Tibetan government—both prior to 1959 and later on while in exile.

The main problem with this unorthodox methodology is that some chapters lack a coherent narrative. The lack of coherence might not necessarily be perceived as a weakness—after all, life in every one of the book’s particular episodes is messy. At other points, however, the narrative is too coherent, coming directly from interviews with some of the participants. Because McGranahan recognizes that the interviews she has collected are fragments and are not authoritative or representative of the experiences of all fighters—she dedicates a significant portion of her introduction to reiterating this point—the occasional moments when she does rely on individual interlocutors are jarring within an otherwise complex and aware account.

McGranahan is (re)writing the history of the movement while at the same time helping to construct the untold history of the lives of Tibetan fighters living in exile and the politics surrounding the memory of the events from the 1950s onward. The differences in perspective among the various participants are instructive, if unsurprising. For the CIA, the capturing of “a Chinese army commander’s pouch, bloodstained and perforated by bullets” (p. 149), which contained extremely informative documents, remains the most important moment of the Tibet operation. But this event does not even come up in the narratives of some former guerrillas and is ranked as relatively unimportant by most of those who do mention it. As explained by McGranahan, this apparent disagreement resulted from the former fighters’ inability to interpret the information contained in the captured documents. What they do remember is that their pay increased after the seizure.

But this is ultimately a book about the Tibetan resistance. When the United States ceased funding the guerrillas, one of their leaders contemplated asking for support from the Soviet Union or Taiwan. His goal was “regaining Tibet by whatever means necessary and with help from whomever might offer it” (p. 157). The loss of U.S. support and the Dalai Lama’s order to halt the operations in Mustang in the early 1970s shattered the Chushi Gangdrug soldiers’ hopes, and they became “orphans of the Cold War,” as former CIA officer John Kenneth Knaus wrote in the title of his 1997 book published by Stanford University Press.

McGranahan also explores what becomes of these memories and the truth behind them as time marches on. Tensions among the exiles about the future of the movement persist in the Tibetan diaspora. McGranahan recognizes the tension between the violent past and the official rhetoric; but she does not believe that these arrested histories undermine the contemporary policy of nonviolence. That may be why many of these veterans decided to speak with her so openly.

McGranahan weaves into the narrative, in a meaningful way, Michel Foucault’s microphysics of power, Benedict Anderson’s imagined communities, and the role of Tibet Mirror in the Tibetan movement, as well as the unsettling of internal hierarchies and authorities theorized by Giorgio Agamben and Milan Kundera. She runs their arguments, together with ideas from Walter Benjamin, Clifford Geertz, Jacques Derrida, Wendy Brown, and others through the realities she unearthed in her research, applying to them her own theoretical gloss.
The book offers a methodological lesson. Diplomatic history has to be coupled with oral history, especially on topics for which archival materials are unlikely to be declassified. These oral histories can change the regime of truth of the official or standard narrative of events. Additionally, this approach allows McGranahan to develop themes that lie outside the mainstream of diplomatic history, such as gender dynamics, the preservation of tradition in exile, and the politics of memory and identity. The book also includes invaluable historiographic discussions, often involving films, which serve as a plausibility test for her argument.

A silence of the book is the Chinese side. The Chinese perspective and sources are absent. I mean not the Chinese interpretation of the events but any information about the degree of knowledge the Chinese had about the Chushi Gangdrug and, more importantly, about the external backing the guerrillas were receiving from the United States, India, Nepal, and other countries. This omission is perhaps explained by the fact that McGranahan is an anthropologist and not a diplomatic historian, but one wonders whether the Chinese story did not come up more in the interviews and in her research. Is this perhaps another arrested history?

McGranahan’s important book builds on the existing literature and complicates our understanding of Tibet and the Tibetan resistance, moving beyond the equation of Buddhism and the Dalai Lama with non-violence, beyond the assumption that Tibetans are a homogeneous, undifferentiated ethnic group. Anthropologists, historians, political scientists, policymakers, and anyone who cares about the Tibetan cause should read it.


Reviewed by Warren I. Cohen, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars

Thomas Christensen has written a superb history of U.S.–East Asian relations from 1949 to 1969, in the service of theories that reveal he is actually a political scientist—a great loss to the historical profession. Especially impressive is his use of Chinese sources, many from the Cold War International History Project at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, as well as books and articles by Chinese scholars and analysts and Chinese documents, some of them intended for internal distribution only (neibu). The principal theory he seeks to demonstrate is explicit in his title: weak alliances can be worse adversaries than those that are tightly integrated. He makes a convincing case that loose alliances, particularly those in which members are competing for leadership—for example, the Soviet Union and the People’s Republic of China (PRC)—are harder to deal with and more likely to bring about regional conflicts. He notes also that ambiguity about the nature of alliance commitments can create comparable problems, as when Moscow and Beijing misread the meaning of the “course
reversal” in U.S. policy toward Japan and miscalculated the U.S. government’s willingness to support Taiwan and South Korea in 1950.

Although Christensen focuses on Cold War alliances in East Asia, he demonstrates that his theories have explanatory value in other contexts. He examines the war between Russia and Georgia in 2008 and finds that indications that NATO would invite Georgia to join it worried Moscow—much as the creation of the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization and Taipei’s efforts to gain a mutual defense pact with the United States worried Beijing in 1954. But Russian leaders saw no credible deterrent taking shape and correctly anticipated that neither NATO nor the United States alone would undertake a significant intervention on Georgia’s behalf. The Russian authorities quickly took advantage of Georgia’s provocations to gain control of a chunk of its territory.

The Arab-Israeli Six Day Mideast War in 1967 provides Christensen with a near perfect analogy with the American war in Vietnam in the 1960s. Competition among Arab states, specifically between Syria and Egypt, for leadership of the pan-Arab movement, prompted Gamal Abdel Nasser to take a more aggressive stance against Israel than he initially intended to when his forces were already engaged in Yemen—much as the Soviet Union found it necessary to do in Indochina, responding to China’s challenge. Israel’s efforts to deter Arab aggression were doomed. Israel’s current confrontation with the Palestinians is likewise far more dangerous than it would be if Hamas and Fatah were united. Again, as Christensen reminds us, the rivalry is “worse than a monolith.”

Christensen’s discussion of the Korean War is easily the best short analysis in print. He suggests that 15 May 1950, when Mao Zedong gave Kim Il-Sung the final go-ahead to invade South Korea, is the most important date in the diplomatic history of the PRC. He argues that Mao was manipulated by his weaker Korean ally and his stronger Soviet ally. On the other side, the absence of a clear U.S. commitment to Chiang Kai-shek (Jiang Jieshi) or Syngman Rhee undercut efforts to deter the Communists and encouraged aggression. Christensen plays with a counterfactual: if the three Communist leaders involved had not mistrusted each other, if China had intervened immediately after the Inchon landing, before United Nations forces crossed the 38th parallel, escalation might have been avoided. Presumably the war would have ended in 1950 with hundreds of thousands fewer casualties. (Of course General Douglas MacArthur might then have decided it was time to bomb Beijing.)

The peak of coordination between the Soviet Union and China was at Geneva in 1954 and lasted until approximately 1957. Christensen notes that the United States and its allies were the chief beneficiaries of Communist unity. Negotiating over Indochina, the Western allies were able to reach a compromise settlement. Ho Chi Minh had no opportunity to play his allies off against each other, no choice but to accept the terms offered.

Turning to the crisis in the Taiwan Strait in 1954–1955, Christensen supports the view dominant among U.S. scholars—but not Chinese—that Mao miscalculated. He failed to appreciate U.S. officials’ reluctance to give Chiang the bilateral alli-
The attack on the offshore islands (Quemoy/Jinmen and Matsu/Mazu) backfired to Chiang's benefit. The result was the Taipei-Washington mutual defense treaty Mao hoped to prevent.

Christensen demonstrates his theoretical framework most easily when he points to the impact of the Sino-Soviet split on the war in Vietnam in the 1960s. The Soviet Union had little interest in Indochina and little interest in stirring up more trouble with the United States but felt compelled to give far more aid to Hanoi than it wished in order to compete with Beijing for leadership in the Communist world. The story is familiar, but Christensen notes that the split had ramifications outside Asia. He points to Nikita Khrushchev's scuttling of the 1960 Paris summit after the U-2 incident, a decision the Soviet leader made out of fear of criticism from Beijing and Soviet hard-liners. He reminds us that the split even had an impact in the Western hemisphere, specifically that it was part of the reason for Khrushchev's decision to put missiles in Cuba.

Finally, readers should be aware that the world of scholarship was deprived of Christensen's contributions for a two-year period when he served as deputy assistant secretary of state for East Asian affairs. Given his involvement in shaping policy at that time and judging by his excellent discussion of the Beijing-Taipei-Washington (and Tokyo) balance that has thus far deterred a Strait crisis in the early years of the 21st century, the academy's loss appears to have been the nation's gain.


Reviewed by Kathryn Weathersby, School of Advanced International Studies, Johns Hopkins University

This magisterial account of the crucial first year of the Korean War marks a significant advance in English-language scholarship on both the Korean conflict and the early Cold War. Allan Millett, the dean of U.S. military historians, is at the height of his powers in this second volume of his planned trilogy on the Korean War. He draws on prodigious research in U.S., South Korean, and United Nations (UN) sources, including previously neglected oral history collections, as well as Russian and Chinese documents and memoirs that have been translated into English. With the benefit of long acquaintance with South Korean military personnel, Millett evaluates the role of the Republic of Korea (ROK) in the war, both military and civilian, more fully and even-handedly than any previous account in English. His account of the remarkable performance of the Chinese officers and soldiers who drove the UN/ROK forces out of North Korea in November–December 1950 is similarly judicious.

Millett's focus remains, nonetheless, on the U.S. war in Korea. He emphasizes that when the war began the U.S. 8th Army was in poor condition—a result of the extensive demobilization following World War II. He details the difficulties inherent in
the emergency mobilization required to fight the war and how the physical limitations of U.S. military power shaped tactical and strategic decisions, particularly the reliance on air power. He vividly details the problems both the South Koreans and the U.S. forces experienced with poor communications, inadequate weapons and training, disease, and battle fatigue. He argues persuasively that U.S. air power, by far the most readily available force, was the most important factor in stopping North Korean tanks in the first weeks of the war, preventing a quick victory by the North.

Highly critical of the leadership of General Douglas MacArthur, Millett argues that the general’s famed amphibious landing at Inchon on 15 September 1950 did little to defeat the North Korean army. He demonstrates that the breakout of ROK/UN forces from the Pusan perimeter later that month was facilitated instead by the steady increase in troops and weapons arriving through the port of Pusan. He is less persuasive in arguing that the Inchon landing sowed the seeds of the strategic disaster of the Chinese entry. ROK/UN forces advancing steadily from the South in September–October 1950 would in any case have pursued the Korean People's Army north of the 38th parallel and thus presumably would have triggered Chinese intervention.

Millett provides a straightforward and balanced discussion of the atrocities frequently committed by both South and North Korean soldiers and the efforts of UN forces to restrain their South Korean allies from revenge killings. The intensity of the inter-Korean struggle supports Millett’s thesis that the war of 1950–1953 should be seen as the continuation of a civil war begun in 1948, “the aborted Phase Three of an insurgency, transformed into a conventional war of ‘liberation’ or ‘aggression’” (p. 13). However, although from a military point of view the conflict could be seen as proceeding in stages from 1945 onward, from a political point of view the creation of separate states in Korea in 1948 fundamentally altered the nature of the decision to mount a conventional military offensive against the rival state. As Millett describes, Stalin based his decision regarding Kim Il-Sung’s request to invade South Korea on his assessment of whether such action would prompt the United States to intervene, thus risking the outbreak of a wider war. The Soviet leader’s view of the impact a military campaign against the ROK would likely have on the Soviet Union’s worldwide conflict with the United States was decisive. Millett notes in his illuminating discussion of the military preparations for the invasion in the spring of 1950 that Stalin could have called off the offensive at any time “had he so chosen since his officers—the Soviet Koreans [Soviet citizens of Korean nationality] and Russians—still controlled the Korean People’s Army at the operational level” (p. 49). Millett’s masterful account thus suggests that the time has come to discard the longstanding debate over whether the Korean War should be regarded as a civil war. The war was clearly both civil and international, with the two aspects inextricably interwoven.

For students of the Cold War perhaps the most valuable aspect of Millett’s careful examination of the first year of the Korean War is his discussion of the fierce debate within the political and military leadership in Washington over how to conduct the war. With a keen appreciation of the importance of personality, Millett assesses the inclinations of each of the major players on the U.S. side and the way their views intersected with the evolving realities in Korea as the war moved from near-defeat to near-
victory to bloody stalemate. This book presents a subtle, wide-ranging, insightful narrative of the multiple forces that shaped the Cold War system as it took shape in response to events in Korea in 1950–1951.

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Reviewed by Jan H. Kalicki, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars

In this respect international affairs are no different from other realms of human relations: issues must be seen not just from one’s own point of view, but from the point of view of the other side. This is certainly true as an analytical matter, and all the more so in seeking to persuade, deter, or compel.

The challenge is all the greater with different cultural and ideological settings; for example, China and the United States. When their interests diverge, political, economic, and strategic factors can significantly complicate their ability to resolve or at least reduce their differences. This is true for a wide range of issues, from exchange rate policy to Iran’s nuclear program. In the former, Western governments are well advised to understand China’s domestic development and anti-inflationary imperatives against the backdrop of a century’s struggle for self-reliance; in the latter, they need to appreciate China’s extreme energy vulnerability and historic allergy to external interventions. In these two cases, many needed policies can prove to be in China’s interest as much as the West’s, but the wise course is to set their advocacy firmly in a Chinese rather than simply a Western context.

Twomey draws an interesting contrast between Sino-U.S. interactions over Korea and over Taiwan. Arguing that states view the world through the lens of their own military doctrine, he details how that lens at times “blurs the view, complicating statecraft, signaling, interpreting the adversary’s signals, and assessing the balance of power” (p. ix). His case studies are well chosen: the United States crosses the 38th parallel in Korea, China crosses the Yalu, and China postpones the invasion of Taiwan. For comparative reference, he then analyzes two cases in another region: the 1967 and 1973 Arab-Israeli wars.

Twomey draws an interesting contrast between Sino-U.S. interactions over Korea and over Taiwan. In the former, he points out how contrasting “theories of victory” spurred China to downplay the superiority of U.S. weapons and to discount U.S. threats of nuclear and strategic air attacks, and also led the United States to downplay Chinese manpower advantages and to discount Chinese threats of intervention if U.S. troops crossed the 38th parallel. In the latter, he describes similar “theories of victory” defined by naval confrontation in the Taiwan Strait, with no misperceptions or miscommunications and ultimately no war. In the Middle East cases, he contrasts the period from 1956 through the early 1970s, when similar Egyptian and Israeli war
strategies minimized underestimates by either side, followed by substantial Egyptian changes to a surprise, limited-aims strategy for the Yom Kippur War.

Doctrinal differences—large and small—are a recurrent focus in Twomey’s analysis. Their importance is clearest in the context of conflict and interaction between military forces. Less persuasive, however, is the view that contrasting or similar military doctrines can determine the course of the confrontation as a whole. Without downplaying the significance of military doctrine, two other factors seem much more important: interests and capabilities. As Twomey acknowledges, Chinese leaders believed the security of their country was endangered by the United Nations Command’s advance to the Yalu; similarly, Chinese reunification has been a top priority. Whereas in Korea the Chinese were able to mobilize millions to restore the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, in Taiwan they lacked the necessary air and naval units to traverse the Strait and defeat Nationalist forces. Doctrinal differences or similarities had little to do with these fundamental facts.

Another complication is the difference between what might be termed “rhetorical” and operational policy. Where states are weak, their leaders may be inclined to overstate their capabilities and Understate those of their enemy for the sake of greater deterrence. For example, Twomey contrasts U.S. deployments of nuclear-capable B-29 bombers to the West Pacific with the early Maoist view that nuclear weapons are paper tigers, but surely it was in China’s interest to appear to discount U.S. nuclear threats even if these played a greater role in Chinese calculations. Whereas China’s rhetorical policy downplayed nuclear weapons, its operational policy gave the People’s Republic strategic status when it acquired its own nuclear capability in the following decade.

Two particular strengths of Twomey’s book are its theory-building and conflict analysis. He tests interesting predictions based on differences in theories of victory, leading to underestimating capabilities, discounting opposite views and prospects of success, underestimating risks of escalation, and increasing the prospects of surprise, among others. In each of his conflict case studies, Twomey also provides detailed analysis of signals, threats, and actions from the perspective of each of the adversaries.

However, it would have been helpful to place each of the case studies in greater historical context. China and the United States experienced a series of crises over the Taiwan Strait, from 1950 to 1996. More such crises are possible in the future. Twomey acknowledges this, but an important question arises: to what extent has Chinese and American behavior changed, to what extent can the two sides be said to have learned from crisis to crisis? In addition, China and the United States experienced crisis interactions not only directly, as in the case of Korea and Taiwan, but indirectly, as in the case of Indochina in 1954 and then over the course of the Vietnam War. (I wrote such an analysis in The Pattern of Sino-American Crises: Political-Military Interactions in the 1950s, published by Cambridge University Press in 1975.) When Twomey refers to history, he often does not give it sufficient weight. An example is Secretary of State Acheson’s failure to include Korea in the U.S. defense perimeter in a well-reported appearance at the National Press Club in January 1950. Acheson was preceded by General Douglas MacArthur’s statement in March 1949 that Korea was
excluded from the U.S. “line of defense” extending to Japan and the Philippines. Noting the first but not the second statement, Twomey says, “this particular signal is overstated” (p. 151). He cites, among other things, Chinese downplaying the likelihood of U.S. intervention elsewhere in Asia—although both assessments could in fact be mutually reinforcing. In fact, Beijing’s focus had long been Chinese reunification—leading to expressions of moral support for North Korea until August 1950, which was after President Truman decided (in June 1950) to send the U.S. Seventh Fleet to the Taiwan Strait.

Twomey is to be commended for seeking to draw policy conclusions from his analysis. He points out that Chinese and U.S. pre-positioning of ground troops in Korea could have significantly reinforced their signals of commitment to the peninsula. (U.S. supplies there amounted to little more than signals equipment in the months before the North Korean attack.) Twomey also argues that with Taiwan surface ships and air squadrons were more credible than missiles and aircraft carriers. More analysis is needed, however, to weigh the enhanced deterrent value of additional military forces maintained at high readiness against an effort to prevent additional escalatory steps in a crisis. It is welcome that Twomey seeks to put such issues of military forces and military doctrine in today’s context, but these issues must then be assessed in a broader political and economic setting, taking into account such significant new developments as multiplying trade relations across the Taiwan Strait and new energy initiatives in the Korean peninsula. Real life has a way of complicating the most elegant theories.


Reviewed by Jongsoo James Lee, Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies, Harvard University

Despite the publication of recent works in English—such as Barbara Demick, Nothing to Envy: Ordinary Lives in North Korea (New York: Spiegel and Grau, 2010); and B. R. Myers, The Cleanest Race: How North Koreans See Themselves and Why It Matters (New York: Melville House, 2010)—that help shed light on the history of North Korea and the conditions of daily life in that most isolated of all countries, North Korea remains an enigma for most Western observers. Part of the difficulty in understanding North Korea is the paucity—except for a few works, such as Charles Armstrong, The North Korean Revolution 1945–1950 (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002); and Andrei Lankov, Crisis in North Korea: The Failure of De-Stalinization, 1956 (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2004)—of recent scholarship on the formative years of that totalitarian state, namely, the late 1940s through the 1950s. These were the years when Korea, after liberation from Japan’s colonial rule, was tragically split into
two halves by the U.S. and Soviet military occupations and two rival regimes emerged on the peninsula, leading to the cataclysmic Korean War (1950–1953) and the subsequent reconstruction efforts in both the Republic of Korea in the south and the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) in the north. For those interested in understanding how North Korea came to form its self-identity through the upheavals of these years, the collection of photographs presented in the volume under review here is a valuable and welcome resource.

These 152 black-and-white photographs, with accompanying captions, present scenes from the DPRK from the late 1940s through the mid-1950s, thus supplying views of North Korea from before, during, and soon after the Korean War. They are catalogued in the book under sections covering the war, postwar reconstruction, and aspects of DPRK life such as politics, agriculture, industry, culture, and education. A large majority of the photographs date from the years 1950–1957, the years of the war and reconstruction, though a few date from as early as 1945. Examining the photographs affords a visual introduction to North Korea’s experience during these tumultuous years and facilitates an understanding of how they affected the lives of the North Korean people. Most of the photos were unearthed from two photographic archives in Budapest: the National Museum and the Military History Institute and Museum of the Ministry of Defense. Most of these had been sent to Hungary by the Korean Central News Agency, the official mouthpiece for the Workers’ Party of Korea—the ruling party in North Korea since the country’s founding—and the North Korean government. In the 1950s, North Korea was actively engaged in various forms of exchange with “fraternal” Communist-bloc countries, including Hungary, and these photos were part of the DPRK’s effort to publicize itself to the outside world. Hence, the photos were propagandistic in nature. To say that many of them sought to portray North Korea and its cause in a favorable light would be an understatement. A great majority engage in brazen attempts to extol the legitimacy of North Korea and, in particular, its “great” leader, Kim Il-Sung, and some spew extreme invective against the “American imperialists” and their “puppet” South Korean regime under Syngman Rhee.

Most of the photographs contain varying amounts of artifice. Some were doctored (e.g., a purged politician has been erased), some were posed (the photographer has choreographed the subjects), some were staged (the photos depict events that did not happen), some were reenacted (especially scenes from the war), and some were photo-ops (i.e., the events depicted in the photos, such as political spectacles, served no purpose other than propaganda). However, a few apparently contain no distortions and were probably taken by foreigners visiting the DPRK, mainly Hungarians and Russians. These amateur photos present scenes of daily life in the DPRK in a more unmediated, natural way.

As for the value and significance of these photos, at a general level they are valuable simply because of the dearth of any visual images from North Korea during these formative years. The photos, buried in the archives of Hungary where scant public interest exists in the early history of North Korea, would never have received attention
in the West had they not been unearthed by the author of the present volume. As such, they afford the viewer glimpses into the North Korean collective life during these years that are simply not available elsewhere. Apart from this general significance, the photographs are valuable in other ways. Once the viewer is aware of their obvious propagandistic nature and is able to discern the underlying political agenda as well as the historical contexts under which they were produced, he or she is more likely to gain an understanding of how North Korea sought to present itself to the outside world during its early years and how this has changed since the 1950s. For example, a striking feature of some of the photos is the evidence of the pervasive Soviet influence on the DPRK in these early years and of the DPRK’s close integration into the Communist bloc as well as its pivotally important alliance with China. Numerous photos present scenes of North Koreans in parade carrying portraits of Vladimir Lenin, Iosif Stalin, Mao Zedong, and so on, next to portraits of Kim Il-Sung, and others depict performances of Russian plays in Pyongyang and illustrate the roles played by Soviet advisers and the Chinese “volunteer” army in the DPRK—all testimonies to the crucial contributions made by the DPRK’s two Communist patrons to the country’s formation, survival and reconstruction. Since the 1950s, North Korea has gone to extremes to erase from memory this deep foreign influence during its formative years in a quest to promote its juche ideology of self-reliance.

Another main value of these photos is that, although most are propagandistic efforts to portray the “travails and achievements” of the “heroic North Korean people,” at least some do provide a sense of the daily life of the North Koreans in a vivid fashion, such as the ones taken by visiting Hungarian journalists that depict the destructive aftermath of U.S. air raids on North Korean cities or the urban and rural scenes of North Koreans going about their daily routines. The latter include images of North Koreans delivering food and buying and selling in markets, as well as of school children emerging from shelters dug in the ground during the war. The photos present stark images of the daily life in the DPRK and offer unmediated depictions of how these years transformed the lives of the rank and file of the North Korean people, young and old, women and men, children and parents, workers, peasants, soldiers, and those of other occupations.

The book is accompanied by a thoughtful introductory essay by Balázs Szalontai, which sets out the historical context of the photographs and suggests how North Korea’s experiences in these formative years conditioned the country’s subsequent development. In addition, Chris Springer has included a brief but helpful introductory essay, a note on the provenance of the photos, and many of the captions accompanying the photographs, as well as endnotes, photo credits, an index, and suggestions for further reading.
Public diplomacy (PD) is much under discussion these days as governments and non-governmental organizations seek ways to influence foreign audiences in countries around the world. This book opens with an 18-page introduction by the two editors, followed by ten chapters on “US Public Diplomacy Today,” five chapters on “The Public Diplomacy of Tomorrow,” and a conclusion that attempts to sum it all up.

Most of the chapters are written by academics or people with a university connection, which is perhaps why the introduction opens with the question, fortunately unanswered, whether PD is an academic discipline. Some of the contributors to this book would lead you to believe that it is. Most of the chapters, however, answer that question by emphasizing the abstract aspects of PD, and only two appear to be based on practical experience abroad. Student readers, consequently, are likely to find the book overly theoretical, but some chapters could easily be recommended by their professors.

Philip M. Taylor, in a chapter titled “Public Diplomacy on Trial,” reviews the failures in U.S. PD that followed the end of the Cold War and the closure of the United States Information Agency, which raises the question of *post hoc, ergo propter hoc?* Eytan Gilboa and Nachman Shai, two former Israeli diplomats, relate how a small country like Israel has been working to overcome its poor image abroad. John Robert Kelley writes about “the estrangement” between PD’s advisory and advocacy roles and reminds us of the failures of Charlotte Beers and what he calls “her Madison Avenue approach” to PD. Scott Lucas writes about “the development and implementation of U.S. foreign policy charged with the awkward task of reconciling interests and ideals.” David Ryan finds fault with George W. Bush’s administration but offers hope for the administration of Barack Obama. Giles Scott-Smith is critical of the Pentagon’s role in PD but hopes that “a cut back in the military budget accompanied by a regeneration of the State Department and a large scale improvement in diplomatic resources could be the best possible outcome from the credit crisis and resulting financial turmoil.” Nicholas J. Cull writes authoritatively on the domestic political aspects of U.S. PD, a factor often neglected in discussing PD, and the mishaps of Karen Hughes as under secretary of state for public diplomacy during the George W. Bush administration. Lina Khatib writes about PD in the Middle East with special emphasis on the successful programs of Qatar. Elizabeth Fox provides a useful, detailed historical overview of U.S. relations with Latin America, and Bevan Sewell follows with a chapter on U.S. PD in Latin America that is heavy on criticism of George W. Bush.

In a final section titled “The Public Diplomacy of Tomorrow,” Daryl Copeland, a retired Canadian diplomat whose service in Thailand, Ethiopia, New Zealand, and Malaysia gave him an insider’s view of PD and made him a strong supporter, says that the overriding purpose of PD in a world of insecurity should be to address the root causes of underdevelopment. R. S. Zaharna introduces a new term, “strategic stake-
holder engagement,” to describe the new communication strategies that “provide the motivation and platform for people to want to connect with others and stay connected long after a public diplomat returns home.” Biljana Scott tells us that the most pressing problem facing PD is “the plethora of possibly conflicting messages, likely to arise from a host of public diplomats spilling out into the world, each with a plenipotentiary mandate,” and she counsels that the overriding skill a public diplomat should possess is a sensitivity to the role of language and narrative in influencing perception, action, and allegiance.” Naren Chitty sees a need to broaden PD by bringing in the public at home, and he concludes that the best PD “arises from measuring up, in terms of policy and practice, to the best humanitarian values of one’s own civilization.” Finally, Ali Fisher asks “Is Public Diplomacy purely a tool to support the extension of an organization’s power or a means to engage and participate in the development of a genuinely shared future?”

A concluding chapter, presumably written by the editors, states that PD will require “a substantial degree of interconnectedness and emphasis on openness and transnational cooperation. . . . Its future rests upon multi- and interdisciplinary research to find the most effective strategies for developing cooperation, This in itself will be a collaborative endeavor; it is time to practice rather than preach.”

Like most collected works, some chapters are better than others. If you want to learn what others have written about PD in recent years, this is your book. But if you want to learn how PD is conducted in practice, you will have to look elsewhere.

Some readers may find the criticism, in several chapters, of U.S. foreign policy, and George W. Bush in particular, to be excessive. Others will see it as justified.

Better editing would have caught numerous typographical errors and misspellings.


Reviewed by Richard Davy, St Antony’s College, Oxford University

So much has been written about Henry Kissinger that one wonders whether any more is really necessary. Calling a halt would be a mistake, however. Kissinger’s life and times are of such central importance to the history and identity of the United States, and of such abiding fascination, that, like history itself, they will rightly continue to be reexamined and reinterpreted for the indefinite future.

Mario Del Pero’s contribution to the genre is a personal essay rather than a comprehensive work.Readable and mercifully short by academic standards, it is a reflective and soberly critical account of Kissinger’s ideas and policies. Del Pero puts forward three main arguments. First, he contests the view of Kissinger, often promoted by the man himself, as the realistic European whose job was to wean naive Americans
from their attachment to moral and ideological elements in their foreign policy, a supposed Metternich of the nuclear era.

Del Pero argues that, “far from being a bold and idiosyncratic response to the crisis—in part real, in part exaggerated—that the United States faced, Kissinger’s prescription was a mostly conventional one” (p. 6). The time for new thinking had arrived because a majority of Americans had become disillusioned with global containment and the modernizing crusades of liberal administrations. Kissinger’s policy prescriptions were therefore initially in tune with the more realistic, even pessimistic, mood of the country.

Del Pero’s second point is to disagree with those who accuse Kissinger of paying insufficient attention to domestic politics. On the contrary, writes del Pero, Kissinger spent an inordinate amount of time trying to explain his policies to journalists, senators, and the public. Third, Del Pero accuses Kissinger of paying only lip service to multipolarity and instead looking at every problem through the bipolar prism of Soviet-American relations in the hope of inducing the Soviet Union to abandon revolutionary aims and join the United States in promoting global order.

These three points are useful as cues for debate and signposts through the vast jungle of writings on Kissinger. They could form the basis of exam questions. But, like exam questions, they tend to oversimplify and set up contradictions that dissolve on closer examination. Del Pero is right that Kissinger’s policies were more conventional than Kissinger wished them to appear. In fact the continuity was even greater than Del Pero suggests. In essence Kissinger was carrying on the policy of containment that had guided U.S. policies toward the Soviet Union since the start of the Cold War. His pursuit of détente also followed repeated attempts by previous administrations, as Melvyn Leffler has shown. Nor did Kissinger bring anything new to Washington in his use of extremely immoral means to pursue perceived moral ends. What was new was the brilliance of his diplomacy, the depth with which he conceptualized it, and above all the new context of growing Soviet military power and global reach. This called for new thinking on methodology, as Del Pero says, but no change in fundamentals. So Del Pero is right about Kissinger’s pragmatism. However, although he has a useful passage on the often spurious distinction between realism and idealism in American discourse, he somewhat overplays the distinction between American idealists and European realists. Both sides of the Atlantic harbored both breeds. As Jeremi Suri has argued, Kissinger fused the two tendencies, believing deeply in the moral mission of the United States even while battling moral crusaders at home. Moreover, when differences arose over European détente, the European idealists turned out to be more realistic about the potential for change than the supposed “European realist” in Washington.

As for the second argument, Del Pero is right that Kissinger made strenuous efforts to explain his policies through the media and in lectures and writings, but this is hardly a profound point. No one who remembers or examines that period can seriously take another view. Kissinger resented and misunderstood domestic politics, but he never underestimated their importance. He worked tirelessly to (as he put it) edu-
cate the American public in the complexity of the world and the need to compromise with repugnant regimes. His mistake, Del Pero writes, was to assume he had achieved a lasting consensus in favor of a less ideological foreign policy, whereas in fact he had won only a temporary respite from the norm of American idealism and exceptionalism. Thus, as Kissinger himself has admitted, he was unprepared for the tide of criticism that rose against him as the right accused him of appeasing the Soviet Union, the left attacked him for supporting immoral regimes, and both accused him of putting stability before justice. Unlike some writers on Kissinger, Del Pero acknowledges that Soviet adventurism contributed to the failure of détente, but Kissinger was also to blame for fostering the illusion (committed to writing at the Moscow summit of 1972) that both sides would cease efforts to obtain unilateral advantage. The result was disillusion on both sides.

Del Pero’s third point about Kissinger’s bipolar approach is valid but also not new. Most writers agree that practically every aspect of Kissinger’s policies was calibrated for its effect on relations with the Soviet Union. Jussi Hanhimäki, for instance, has also pointed out that this led Kissinger to ignore or misunderstand regional conflicts, social pressures, and human rights—to the longer-term detriment of U.S. interests. Del Pero drives home the point: “On several occasions during the most critical phases of détente one had the impression that Soviet and US leaders were on the same side, whether against internal opponents of détente . . . or those, particularly in Western Europe, who challenged the persistence of a rigidly bipolar structure” (p. 149).

Thus Del Pero breaks little if any new ground, but his book well deserves a place on the long shelves devoted to Kissinger for its intelligent personal perspective, well-informed reflections, and stimulating contribution to the ongoing debate about Kissinger’s place in history.


Reviewed by Rochelle Goldberg Ruthchild, Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies, Harvard University

Scholarship on the Soviet period has focused heavily on the political. There is certainly justification for this, but the unfortunate result is that daily life has come under far less scrutiny. Amy Randall shines needed light on an important aspect of the process of developing a new Soviet way of life and culture in her excellent book.

Today the words “Soviet,” “customer service,” and “supply” are about as far from synonymous as can be. But in the 1930s, the new state’s planners were still in the throes of envisioning a new world. Randall focuses specifically on the Stalinist campaign, launched in 1931, to develop “Soviet trade” and thereby address a “major distribution and consumer goods crisis largely engendered by Soviet policies” (p. 1). Of-
ferring an alternative to capitalist consumption, the “Soviet dream world” offered consumption “for cultural refinement and modernization,” uplifting and educating model citizens for the new socialist state (p. 2). Randall takes issue with scholars who see the attention to consumerism as evidence of the regime’s “embourgeoisement” and catering to “middle class values.” Instead, Randall argues, “the trade campaign and consumer policies of the 1930s were the first full-fledged attempt by Communist authorities to address the issues of distribution and consumption under socialism” (p. 10).

Situating her narrative in the context of socialist experimentation, Randall shows how difficult it was to reconcile rigid ideals about the role of the market in a socialist economy with the practice of supplying modern consumer needs. But she also shows that the process of seeking to create a revolutionary model of consumption expanded the definition of the Soviet citizen and provided opportunities for greater agency, or the illusion of agency, within the parameters of the Stalinist state. The book surveys the development of the new approach to retailing and consumption; the enunciation of the ideals of “revolutionary retailing”; the legitimization of Soviet trade, quotas, and Stakhanovism in the retail labor force; the tension between theory and practice and control from above and resistance from below; and the attempts to define the “new Soviet consumer.” Randall also offers a comparative analysis of Soviet, Western capitalist, and fascist consumer culture in the 1930s.

The book incorporates gender as a category of historical analysis in important ways, showing how in the retail sector Soviet understandings of gender changed from the 1920s to the 1930s and how this both drove and reflected the changing needs of the state. Before the revolution, female sales clerks were poorly paid and at the mercy of their bosses, and they often resorted to prostitution to survive. After the revolution, state policy emphasized the similarity between women and men, effacing difference in the name of a universal humanity. In reality, the norm was male, and both sexes were encouraged to strive for largely male attributes. In the 1930s, state policy changed, identifying and honoring specifically “womanly” characteristics, seeking to incorporate these into the general understanding of what constituted a model Soviet citizen. With the feminization of the retail labor force, “the ideal Soviet retail worker was expected to combine positive feminine traits of attentive service, honesty, and kultur'nost, with more traditionally masculine traits of efficiency and productivity” (p. 88).

The Soviet masculine ideal was reflected in the 1930s by the injunctions to increase production and the honoring of hero workers such as the coal miner Aleksei Stakhanov. Stakhanov is well known. Much less well known is the extension of similar incentives to the overwhelmingly female sector of retail trade. Serafima Borisova, honored in 1935 as an exemplary sales clerk, met sales norms, beautified her part of the store, and provided information to her customers. Borisova and her comrades modeled a form of marketing distinct from that often seen in the West. Rather than encourage rampant materialism, Soviet sales clerks were to be devoted to helping customers make informed choices. In using Stakhanovism in the retail sector, the state
was able to incorporate marginal workers and consumers into the revolutionary project. Thus, the concept of the worker expanded to include not only the male laboring in heavy industry but the female retail worker as well.

Stalinist consumer policy involved not only salesworkers but also consumers, who were enlisted in campaigns for mass supervision of the retail sector. In 1938, the journal *Rabotnitsa* issued the call: “Women-workers, wives of industrial and white-collar workers—help trade organizations make trade precise and cultured via kontrol” (p. 122). Randall shows how invocations to consumers to identify problems in the retail sector empowered ordinary people to feel more involved in constructing the ideal socialist society. But such campaigns also aided the Stalinist goal of creating “a society of mutual surveillance” (p. 133).

Randall makes an important contribution as well in her chapter comparing “consumer-citizenship” in the United States, Great Britain, Nazi Germany, and the Soviet Union in the 1930s. In all these states, the government took a role in mobilizing consumers for state goals. In the capitalist countries, this was primarily to encourage more purchasing of goods. In Nazi Germany, consumers, by their decisions, were to support the racial policies of the Third Reich, buying German, boycotting Jewish stores, creating an autonomous economy. In the Soviet Union, consumers were mobilized to create a new socialist world in which consumers and workers aided in creating a strong economy. Improving the welfare of the least fortunate and previously marginalized was a key goal.

Randall did her homework. She undertook extensive research in eleven archives, not only in Moscow but in Saratov and Tashkent. She perused 25 newspapers and other periodicals, plus an impressive array of other primary and secondary sources. For an understanding of Soviet *byt’* in the thirties, the ways in which the regime mobilized and sought also to cater to basic consumer needs with the goal of establishing a revolutionary alternative to capitalist consumption, Randall’s book is indispensable.

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Reviewed by Lester W. Grau, Foreign Military Studies Office, U.S. Army

Two important English-language books on the Soviet-Afghan War were published in 2011. This is noteworthy because for many years Western scholarship on the war was limited to a small group of academics, soldiers, retired diplomats, regional specialists, and journalists. Publication was sporadic. Now, Russian scholars, journalists, and former officials and soldiers have produced a variety of books on the subject, and the cur-
rent conflict in Afghanistan has created a Western demand for more information on the last Afghanistan conflict.

Sir Rodric Braithwaite is known and respected as one of the grand old men of the Western expert community on the USSR/Russia. Following occupation duties as a soldier in postwar Vienna, Braithwaite studied Russian at the University of Cambridge from 1952 to 1955. He then entered the Foreign Service and, among other postings, had two tours in Moscow, the second as British ambassador from 1988 to 1992. This last tour spanned the end of the Soviet-Afghan War and the collapse of the Soviet Union, placing him in an optimum position to view and analyze these events. This is his third book on Russian affairs.

Artemy M. Kalinovsky is a younger analyst who has already established a name for himself in the academic community. With degrees in history from the London School of Economics and Political Science and from George Washington University, he is on the faculty of the Universiteit van Amsterdam. This book is a revised version of his doctoral thesis.

Scholarship on the Soviet-Afghan War begins with the work of two participants in that conflict. General Aleksandr Lyakhovskii (who died on 2 February 2009) wrote the pivotal work on the conflict (Tragediya i doblesti Afgana) based on his service with the Soviet Ministry of Defense operational group inside Afghanistan during the conflict. General Makhmut Gareev wrote the pivotal work (Moya poslednyaya voina) on the Soviet withdrawal and aftermath based on his assignment as the senior Soviet adviser after the departure of the Soviet 40th Army. Braithwaite and Kalinovsky build on these earlier works, and both of them interviewed Lyakhovskii. Primary research in the documents of the war should be in Dari and Russian. Most of the available and accessible material, however, is in Russian, a reality that leads to a certain bias in almost all works on the subject.

Braithwaite uses his Russian-language skills and his access to Russian archives, diplomatic contacts, and a variety of Russian friends and contacts to lay out the Soviet perspective on events. He has produced a balanced, often sympathetic work on the Soviet Union’s long war in Afghanistan that discounts many of the assumptions, pronouncements, and misconceptions that are held in the West. The book is more detailed on political events (Braithwaite was, after all, an ambassador) and individual vignettes and is not so much a military history of the war as a thematic series of short vignettes about many of the people who were involved in it. This might sound like a chaotic approach, but it works well. The book is about the Afgantsy—the Russians who served in Afghanistan. This is their story written for an English-speaking audience.

Afgantsy’s core theme is that the Soviet 40th Army came to prop up a Communist regime in chaos. Soviet leaders intended to leave within two years but were trapped in the middle of a civil war. The Soviet army had its problems but fought successfully, controlled its battle space, and left the country in relatively good order. Braithwaite weaves the vignettes throughout this theme and covers peripheral topics such as advisers, troop hazing, women in combat, the combat experience, the missing in action,
post-traumatic stress, and the internal politics of the Soviet Politburo. The book is remarkably well crafted; it also has the most poignant dedication I have read.

Kalinovsky’s book is a solid piece of diplomatic and political history of the Soviet-Afghan War; it is a study of Soviet decision-making within the Politburo. Despite its title, it is a political history of the entire conflict and its aftermath. Kalinovsky relies on existing scholarship, interviews, archives, and material that until recently was unavailable, producing a plausible account of the underlying politics and decisions in Moscow that shaped the war and its termination. He covers the Soviet military and state security (KGB) input to the government and the role of these agencies in the war. The book is not a military history but does tie key military events to the decisions of the governments in Moscow and Kabul. Its strength is that it employs a variety of Soviet and Russian sources that are not widely read in the West. The book also throws a bit more light on the still-murky politics of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan/Republic of Afghanistan.

_A Long Goodbye_ is a book with a tight focus on the Kremlin politics and foreign policy connected to the Soviet-Afghan War and is principally a book about Mikhail Gorbachev and his attempts to lead the Soviet Politburo on this issue. In this, Kalinovsky does an excellent job and delights the old Soviet analysts among us who miss the days of studying the turgid speeches of Leonid Brezhnev and pondering the Soviet bureaucratic maze. For us specialists, this is an enjoyable and easy read. For the non-specialist, perhaps not as much.

Both authors have gathered a lot of their material from personal interviews with participants. Oral histories are great tools for the historian of recent events but have the normal problems of bias, selectivity, accuracy of memory, and retrospective determinism, causing great difficulty in producing an accurate picture from numerous, conflicting accounts. The interviewer goes through a long, often-painful personal learning process before becoming thoroughly comfortable with interviewing equipment, scheduling, planning, time management, and cross-questioning. Perhaps a couple of journalism courses and work as an interrogator would help. Even using someone else’s interview can be challenging. Both authors appear to have gained excellent material from their interviews, so kudos are in order for their success.

Both authors are at ease when dealing with Russian individuals and society. Because both books are about the Soviet Union, the authors need to understand Russian language, culture, and proprieties and have a bit of “street smarts.” Interviews, as well as much written material, need to be understood in light of nuances, context, and underlying societal background.

Both authors seem to get a bit off track when comparing the Vietnam War with the Soviet-Afghan War. Although this is a popular exercise among journalists, it poses problems from a historian’s perspective. Although there were clear political and ideological ties and consequences between the two wars and although both involved modern armies from superpowers with strategic nuclear weapons, the wars in fact were very different. One was fought in the jungles of Southeast Asia against Communist conventional forces of a neighboring state and some centrally controlled local guerril-
las, whereas the other was a mountain war fought in Central Asia by Communist forces against local and some foreign guerrillas who lacked any form of central control but were united by religion. Historians seldom compare the Russian army and Russian guerrilla fighters of 1812 with the Spanish guerrillas and Wellington’s Army used in the Peninsular Campaign even though they had a common enemy, the French army. History may not repeat itself, but it provides some great models. All models, however, require modification to fit the country, history, customs, economy, and ideology of the model to the current event.

Kalinovsky takes his comparison one additional step. He attempts to tie Gorbachev and Barack Obama together as like-minded campaigners for change who see Afghanistan as a stumbling block to political gain, fail to control the main actors of their own Afghanistan policy, and see themselves as hostage to the consequences of failure should the incumbent Afghan government fail to survive. This reviewer is skeptical of these assertions but leaves the final decision to the reader. History is history, analysis is analysis, but is the symmetry of variables and time sufficient in this case? Probably not.

Gorbachev was not in power when the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan collapsed in April 1992. Following the failed coup in August 1991, Gorbachev lost all leverage over Soviet policy in Afghanistan. Boris Yeltsin, the president of the Russian Federation, was the one who abruptly ended military and other assistance to Kabul in September 1991. Why was Yeltsin so opposed to Gorbachev’s Afghanistan policy, and what did he think he would gain by selling out Najibullah? Frank Snepp, the one-time Central Intelligence Agency station chief in South Vietnam, writes that U.S. policy in Vietnam became a search for “a decent interval” before the collapse of Saigon. Judged by that criterion, Gorbachev’s policy delivered just such an interval in Kabul for the Soviet Union, one that the new government of Russia did not consider of any merit.

Both of these are excellent books that add much to the scholarship of the Soviet-Afghan War. Both are primarily political and diplomatic histories. Braithwaite’s also has a good bit of military history included plus personal vignettes that add much to the understanding of this conflict and a people caught in war.


Reviewed by Golfo Alexopoulos, University of South Florida

Steven Barnes is a leading authority on the Gulag who has done as much as anyone to bring its dark history to light. His meticulously researched book on the Soviet Gulag looks at one of the largest and most enduring camps, Karlag, in the Karaganda region of Kazakhstan. The book draws on wide-ranging archival sources and memoir accounts and examines many key elements in the Gulag’s history: the impact of external
events (famine, terror, war, annexations) on camp life, the ways gender and ethnicity played out on the ground, the Gulag’s use of surveillance techniques, and its construction of social and national hierarchies. This important book deserves a wide audience.

Barnes’s greatest contribution is his brilliant account of the wartime and postwar years—arguably the most significant period in the Gulag’s long history. The book explores the origins and impact of the Gulag’s key innovations of the 1940s: the katorga camp divisions, filtrations camps, special camps, and the policy on permanent exile. The wartime and postwar influx of a new contingent with a new political consciousness, Barnes writes, represents a crucial event in Gulag history. He details how these prisoners with life experience outside the Soviet Union—war veterans and people from the newly annexed territories of western Ukraine, western Belarus, Bessarabia, and the Baltic states, many of whom fought with nationalist organizations and partisan armies—fundamentally reshaped Gulag society and largely produced the camp unrest that emerged in the institution’s twilight years. His multilayered account of Karlag at war is a highlight of the book. One fascinating story concerned Karlag’s director who came under pressure from the Gulag chief for the high mortality rates at his camp during the war. The camp director’s response was to shift blame to his health director and have him fired, only to be sacked himself a year later. In the meantime, the terrible death rates persisted because blame shifting represented the full extent of the problem-solving efforts at all levels. Among other things, Barnes’s book is indispensable for revealing the external pressures, incentives, strategies, and worldviews of those involved in day-to-day camp operations.

Barnes argues that the Gulag represented a transformative space in which the Communist party sought to realize its revolutionary project of reforging human raw material and redeeming the criminal. He writes: “Given the constant release of a significant portion of the Gulag population throughout the institution’s history, it is quite clear that redeemability, at least for some segment of the prisoner population, was never totally abandoned” (p. 12). My chief quibble with the book is that the theme of individual redeemability is overstated and dominates other elements of Barnes’s superb analysis—for example, his treatment of violence. Barnes argues convincingly that violence/death and reform/transformation were inextricable, in both theory and practice. In the memoir literature, violence often appears as the work of individual sadists, but Barnes offers a more complex exploration of violence that merges ideology and practice. He asserts that, “in the Soviet ethos, the coexistence of violence and transformation—creation and destruction—was no contradiction at all. In fact, one was unimaginable without the other” (p. 15). The belief played out on the ground repeatedly, because “Gulag authorities were unembarrassed about the tie between the failure to fulfill labor norms and death” (p. 77).

Barnes also privileges the political over the economic: “the Gulag was in fact a penal institution first, and a productive institution second” (p. 39). Yet he notes throughout the book that the economic and political were tightly interwoven and represented competing tasks that vied for the attention of camp officials. Barnes states: “The Gulag served many different functions—economic and penal—and the demands of one function usually interfered with another. At the local level, camp au-
authorities were forced to work through these contradictory demands to decide what held priority” (p. 2). One of the book’s great strengths is the way it illuminates the tensions and contradictions that characterized Gulag operations.

Death and Redemption addresses many of the central questions in the Gulag historiography, such as the institution’s economic impact and the role of prisoner unrest. Having mastered the archival record in Karaganda, Barnes highlights the extent of economic inefficiency and waste in the system. In particular, he notes that the camps did not contribute greatly to economic production during the war: “If the Soviet Union won the war through economic production, it did so despite the Gulag, and not because of it” (p. 128). His rich narrative on the 1954 prisoner uprising in Kengir provides a gripping account of the personalities, language, and critical moments in this remarkable event. At the same time, Barnes cautions against exaggerating the presence and significance of Gulag unrest, escapes, and strikes: “the Gulag experienced remarkably little mass resistance throughout its history. . . . Truly significant mass resistance . . . awaited the postwar period and especially the death of Stalin. Even then, mass resistance was largely limited to the small group of special camps created in 1948” (p. 212).

Barnes urges us to understand the Gulag as a part of broader Soviet society, not as an island or archipelago, and to appreciate “the extremely close connection between life in the Gulag and life outside the Gulag” (p. 78). He embeds the Gulag within the Soviet project of social and economic transformation and describes the camps as deeply influenced by the experiences of the larger society. Like all Soviet citizens, prisoners felt the impact of Stalin’s revolution, and their distant sites were profoundly affected by terror and war. Barnes sums up this theme at the end of the book: “The Gulag was thoroughly integrated into the fabric of the Soviet Union, touching the lives of nearly every Soviet citizen whether directly or through the fate of a friend, colleague, or family member” (p. 254). An institution of such impact deserves no less than this first-rate analysis. Death and Redemption is an outstanding book on one of Europe’s most brutal institutions.


Reviewed by Gottfried Niedhart, University of Mannheim

The topic of détente has become a major field of research. The papers published in this volume were produced for a conference at the University of Copenhagen in late 2007. In their introduction on “the secrets of European détente” the editors stress the importance of the postwar reconstruction in Western Europe, which was accomplished by the mid-1960s and had an enormous impact on the eastern part of the continent. Contrary to the “deep freeze” in the relationship of the superpowers from 1976
to 1985, Europe enjoyed a “lasting détente” (p. 7). Thus, the cover photo showing the smiling and joking leaders of the superpowers is somewhat misleading.

The European détente had its roots in the strength of the West, in particular in the “revitalization of France and West Germany” (p. 7), whereas the East was in need of cooperation with the West and, for various reasons, had little choice but to respond positively to Western initiatives in détente. Bridge-building was appealing for both Western and Eastern Europe. Western proponents of détente wanted to overcome the division of Europe. From an East European perspective the West served as a magnet because of its “increasing affluence, openness and democracy” (p. 8). Eastern regimes, contrary to the desires of large segments of their population, were averse to democracy but became dependent on loans from Western banks and on economic and technological infusions from the West. Furthermore, the main political obstacle to an improvement of East-West relations in Europe disappeared when the Federal Republic of Germany launched its Ostpolitik and, although insisting on the principle of peaceful change of borders, decided to respect the postwar territorial order. Finally, the West impressed the Warsaw Pact countries with the close transatlantic relationship: “The strong alliance between the United States and western Europe made détente more attractive to eastern European elites. It signalled that at least on some issues one could have both the power and productivity of America and the social inclusiveness of France or Germany” (p. 10).

Concluding their introduction, the editors modestly predict “that even more secrets of European détente remain to be revealed” by future “research based on multinational and comparative archival studies” (p. 16). On the whole, most of the papers collected here fulfill these requirements. The two pieces by Wanda Jarzabek and Oliver Bange explore how Poland and the German Democratic Republic reacted to détente and Ostpolitik. Two authors deal with the United States: Giovanni Bernardini on the U.S.–West German relationship “on the road to Helsinki”; and Stephan Kieninger on the conflicting notions of détente held in the White House and the State Department. The impact of the European Community and the neutral and nonaligned (N+N) states on the process of détente and especially on the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) is analyzed by Angela Romano and Thomas Fischer. Sarah B. Snyder, Gregory F. Domber, and Bent Boel turn to the problem of how the human rights issue in the East was supported or enforced in the 1970s and 1980s by U.S. and West European governments or non-governmental organizations.

This sample of topics is highly selective and does not cover the whole story of how the Iron Curtain was perforated. Surprisingly, no special treatments of French détente policy and German Ostpolitik (and their rivalry in pushing détente) are included. Regrettably, a paper on economic détente is missing. However, these are wishes that do not detract from the value of this collection in any way. The editors do not discuss whether the notion “Cold War” is really appropriate to describe the whole period of East-West relations from 1946/1947 through 1989/1990. They leave this to Wilfried Loth, who, in his paper on “The Cold War: What It Was About and Why It Ended,” argues that the metaphor “Cold War” does express certain facets of the conflict but not its whole reality (as this collection of essays proves). At the same time
Loth hesitates “to choose the term ‘East-West conflict’ as a generic term and to merely consider the ‘Cold War’ as one state of this conflict, which reoccurred at different times and to different degrees” (p. 30). To this reviewer’s mind the reason he gives is not convincing at all: “The term ‘Cold War’, of course, is much more succinct than ‘East-West conflict’” (p. 31).