Book Reviews


Reviewed by Heidi Kroll, U.S. Federal Communications Commission

Julia Child became a cultural icon when I was growing up in the 1960s. Her cooking shows on the Public Broadcasting System inspired my mother to purchase her cookbooks and use her recipes to make seemingly exotic dishes like soufflé and beef bourguignon. My first academic position was at a remotely located liberal arts college in Minnesota, and I remember being invited to a fellow faculty member’s home for dinner where his wife proudly served a delicious beef stew with olives and potatoes from a Julia Child recipe. I myself have prepared Julia Child’s French onion soup and her chocolate and almond cake (*reine de saba*) for friends and colleagues. I enjoyed her memoir, *My Life in France,* and the film *Julie and Julia,* which is based in part on the memoir. I am also a fan of food writers Anthony Bourdain and Ruth Reichl, mainly because I find their light fare a perfect way to kill time on long-distance flights. So when asked to review *Julia Child’s “The French Chef”* by Dana Polan, I thought, why not?

I soon discovered that my experience watching Julia Child on television and indulging in dishes made from her recipes did not adequately prepare me to review a book that takes a scholarly approach to the *The French Chef.* Polan, a professor of cinema studies at New York University, uses the history of Julia Child’s television show *The French Chef* as a case study to explore the evolution of American television and popular culture in the 1960s and early 1970s. Polan sets the stage with two background chapters on the history of television cooking shows prior to Julia Child and the Americanization of French cuisine. The next four chapters cover the creation of the show, the technical details of its production and filming, and the history of its run. The concluding chapter analyzes the show and its popularity from the perspective of cultural theory.

Anticipating that some will question the need for a scholarly treatment of what most people regard as “just entertainment,” Polan responds that “why something comes off as fun and why a particular culture needs fun when it does and in the form in which it does are already questions of a society and its values” (p. 39). Accordingly, I tried to keep an open mind. Polan makes a persuasive case that Julia Child’s distinctive personality and instruction methods, and the way her camera crew captured these on film, were crucial in making an unfamiliar cuisine accessible to ordinary Americans in a non-threatening manner. At times, however, the exposition of this thesis gets mired...
in the details of the show’s production process. Polan also has a penchant for using analogies that stretch the imagination without really adding any insight to the analysis—for example, comparing Julia Child’s style of cooking instruction first to the James Bond genre of spy stories (pp. 80–82) and then to French structuralism (pp. 109–111).

What, then, does the book have to do with the study of the Cold War, other than the historical period it covers? The editor of the Journal of Cold War Studies hinted that the topic of the book is relevant to the concept of “soft power.” The introductory chapter of Polan’s book implicitly touches on this concept. Polan cites the argument of Serge Guilbault, in his book How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art, that “postwar America, within the context of new geopolitics, needed to show the world that it had culture as well as military might on its side, and this involved a co-optation of European aesthetic traditions to its own ends” (p. 35). Applying this to Julia Child, Polan notes that “the Frenchness she offered up on television was Americanized to the core” (p. 36). In a subsequent chapter, Polan discusses the generally positive coverage in the French press of Julia Child’s attempt to bring French cuisine to Americans (though the show itself never aired in France), and the failed attempt by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) to bring The French Chef to the United Kingdom (the BBC cancelled the show within six months of its debut).

Beyond these examples, however, Polan does not follow through on Guilbault’s argument in the remaining chapters, nor does he return to it in his concluding analysis. Therefore, even if scholars of the Cold War who are interested in the significance of soft power find Polan’s book a useful reference, they will have to draw their own conclusions about the impact of Julia Child’s rejuvenation of American culinary arts on the attraction of American culture and America’s ability to project power and influence during the Cold War.


Reviewed by Stephen J. Whitfield, Brandeis University

Although the category of “modernism” gets a heavy workout in this rigorous specimen of intellectual history, Robert Genter divides the development of aesthetic and philosophical concerns into “high” and “romantic” versions. The “threat of totalitarianism drove most political discussions in the 1950s,” he argues (p. 14); and late modernists were not exempt from the pressures of public life. But the high modernists, like Theodor Adorno, Lionel Trilling, and Dwight Macdonald, upheld the liberal tradition and the humanities against the demands of the garrison state and invoked an ideal of independent thought against the incursions of mass society. The romantic modernists, like Norman O. Brown, Norman Mailer, and Willem de Kooning, were especially attuned to the perils that totalitarianism (very broadly defined) posed to the
psyche and insisted on the primacy of creative urges and bodily desire in offering resistance to the administered society. In Genter’s assured and fluid reading, late modernism lacks a birth certificate. But by the 1960s, the fears generated in the immediate postwar era had receded; and last rites were performed by the likes of Andy Warhol, Michel Foucault, and the drug gurus and hippies of the counterculture.

But what, the reader may wonder, does this history have to do with the Cold War that is announced in Genter’s subtitle? He does sometimes connect aesthetic claims to the larger geopolitical framework. After all, in a world threatened with a nuclear showdown between East and West, what could be more tempting than to retreat into the refuge of art? What could be nobler than to testify to the contrast between the brutality and cruelty of relations between sovereign states and the sublimity of pigment on canvas, of poems on pages? As warfare became even more destructive through technical sophistication without moral restraint, as the Enlightenment faith in rational meliorism became perverted into the scientifically sophisticated pursuit of mass murder and genocide, why not tap instead the instincts of the artist and release feelings that could spur enchantment? Late Modernism can certainly be read as displaying a postwar tendency to buck the vocation of public intellectual and as seeking to find order in the imagination rather than to redress the disorder of politics. But Genter’s own attempts to show that culture was a function of the Cold War are exasperatingly sporadic and erratic, and he fails to develop or sustain any argument along such lines. Perhaps he realizes that a case for the distinctive effect of geopolitics would not be persuasive. After all, as he well knows, the first great critical analysis that an American undertook of modernist disengagement was Edmund Wilson’s Axel’s Castle (1931), set in the 1920s.

Without a coherent claim for the recognizable influence of the Zeitgeist, Late Modernism ricochets from one topic to another with no obvious direction or explicit logic. Genter makes almost no effort to justify why particular thinkers and painters (but not composers or sculptors or architects) have been selected for scrutiny. Not that his figures are eccentric. Indeed most of them (David Riesman, Clement Greenberg, James Baldwin, etc.) would tempt the reader to quote Captain Renault’s instructions to his police force in Casablanca. But there are a few surprises—above all the space that Late Modernism gives to the literary theorist Kenneth Burke and to the sociologist Erving Goffman, neither of whose work is conventionally understood to be politically inflected. Instead they and the other figures in this book are treated in terms indigenous to the formal properties and historical oscillations of the fields that these writers and artists enlivened. Genter thereby forfeits opportunities to show how the postwar anti-Communist consensus was consolidated or later enfeebled. Here the obvious case is C. Wright Mills, whose 1956 challenge to democratic pretensions, The Power Elite, was soon followed by pamphleteering against the Departments of Defense and State in The Causes of World War Three and Listen, Yankee. Yet Genter prefers to focus on the radical sociologist’s uncertainties about his academic discipline and about his place within it. Symptomatic of Genter’s approach is that Erich Fromm’s The Art of Loving is mentioned, but not Fromm’s political texts like May Man Prevail? or The Sane Society.
But the loving of art that is so lucidly treated in Genter’s book did get deployed on behalf of the beleaguered self, a theme that emerges in every chapter of *Late Modernism*. Whether called the ego or the subject or even identity, the self was believed to be under assault in a mass society that made organizations as hierarchical as they were pervasive. Anomie and the sense that individual autonomy was imperiled were indeed feared in the 1940s and 1950s and were diagnosed as breeding grounds for the totalitarian temptation. But how serious was such a danger in the United States? Surely such concern was exaggerated—especially in retrospect, which should have given Genter a chance to puncture some of the unwarranted nostalgia for an earlier era. He might also have paid some attention to the way the creative spirit was enlisted as an ideal against the regimentation and collectivism of the Soviet Union and its allies. The abstract expressionists and the jazzmen were of course elevated to the status of icons of artistic freedom, whose works the U.S. Department of State and the U.S. Information Agency showed abroad to win points in the competition against socialist realism. In wriggling out of the historical shadow of the dueling political systems, *Late Modernism* unfortunately ignores the resilience of an American culture that was not merely—and maybe was not even primarily—a repressive clamp on the plentitude of creative and critical expression.


Reviewed by Thomas M. Nichols, U.S. Naval War College

David Schmitz’s volume on the career of Brent Scowcroft is part of a series of biographies that places the lives of important figures in U.S. foreign policy in their historical context. This is an important project and is a welcome change from studies, particularly of the Cold War, that have increasingly become detached from historical circumstances and subjected to post hoc moral and historical reasoning. Schmitz’s fluidly readable contribution is not merely a retelling of the events of Scowcroft’s career; rather, Schmitz takes us through the formation of this most archetypal establishment Cold Warrior, from the 1970s through today, while developing a narrative of the evolution of U.S. foreign policy in the same period.

One question that might immediately arise even from a quick look at the cover is whether Scowcroft merits an entire biography (or an entire biography yet). Unlike Colin Powell (who is profiled in the same series), Scowcroft did not rise to a cabinet appointment, nor was he ever mooted as a serious candidate for high elected office. If anything, Scowcroft has been the very model of a modern American general: serving his country both in uniform and out, while maintaining the careful distance from the rough-and-tumble of elected politics that eventually tarnished the legacies of some of the people around him, like Powell and Condoleezza Rice. But Scowcroft was no
“Zelig,” merely a face in every picture of every important gathering of policymakers. He was, to employ a cliché, one of the architects of U.S. foreign policy both in defeat in the 1970s and in triumph in the 1980s. That is a mixed record; few people who were associated with Gerald Ford and George H. W. Bush retain the kind of remarkably apolitical and almost universal respect accorded to Scowcroft.

Schmitz succeeds in both introducing us to Scowcroft and providing a primer on traditional center-right foreign policy in the last phases of the Cold War. But although Schmitz does not fall into hagiography, readers looking for a more uncritical account of Scowcroft’s career may find two aspects of the book troubling.

First, Schmitz often tells us what Scowcroft was thinking or feeling, without much to go on other than the Bob Woodward device of simply saying so. Schmitz interviewed Scowcroft, and it shows. In places where the reader might question a particular fork in the road, Schmitz is careful to note that Scowcroft has concerns or worries or thoughts that in some cases he kept to himself. For example, Schmitz writes, “Scowcroft had mixed opinions about [Jimmy] Carter’s foreign policy, although he characteristically kept his most critical views and opposition to specific policies private” (p. 65). Why? What were they? This is a hazardous enough device for a journalist, but it is even more problematic for a scholar, who must judge the motivations of a policymaker’s actions based on the way he or she saw things at the time, which may or may not correspond to the way he or she views things decades later. Memoirs and first-hand accounts are crucial tools for historians and political scientists alike, but even the best of these must be interpreted carefully, and others—Mikhail Gorbachev’s mendacious post-Soviet writings come to mind—are more a challenge than a guide to establishing the truth.

This leads to the second problem: Schmitz relies too much on a few public sources, especially Scowcroft’s own retrospective writings. The two chapters that cover the period from 1989 to 1991, including the momentous events from the fall of the Berlin Wall to the defeat of Iraq in the first Gulf War, account for nearly half the book. Schmitz’s sources here amount to a staggering 182 footnotes, but of those, half are references either to Scowcroft’s book with former President George H. W. Bush, A World Transformed, or to the book Scowcroft wrote in 2008 with Zbigniew Brzezinski, America and the World. Schmitz also includes several references to Rice, who is still an active participant in the policy arena. Using one’s subject’s own writings is not inherently wrong—any author who did not include them would be remiss—but to explain a period in U.S. foreign policy simply by referring back to Scowcroft’s own post hoc explanation is difficult. Schmitz’s chapters on this period seem like little more than an abbreviated commentary on Scowcroft’s books.

Still, this is a volume worth reading. If it is not as incisive as a more distanced biography might have been, it is a useful resource for students as well as for scholars of international relations, public policy, and Cold War history.

Reviewed by Breck Walker, Sewanee—University of the South

Lyndon Johnson’s passion as president was domestic policy, yet his administration came to be defined, then and now, by his escalation of the conflict in Vietnam. Jonathan Colman with this brisk and thoughtful book is the latest in a growing number of revisionists who argue that Johnson’s failures in Vietnam have been overstated and his judicious stewardship of a broader American diplomacy has been either ignored or unfairly maligned.

Colman devotes almost a quarter of his book to Vietnam and concludes that the escalation of U.S. military efforts was “a rational and well considered policy” (p. 4) driven by the consensus among political and military elites in 1964–1965 about the “Cold War verities” of containment, dominoes, and the overarching need to maintain U.S. credibility with friends and foes alike. Johnson dispatched increasing numbers of U.S. combat troops to Vietnam because he had no other viable alternatives to preserve the Saigon regime from a takeover by the Communist North. Colman even suggests a kind of prudence in Johnson’s unsuccessful attempt to calibrate a multipronged strategy designed to prevent a Communist victory over a U.S. ally, to avoid provoking direct Chinese military intervention, and to maintain political support at home. In Colman’s depiction, the Johnson administration made significant strides in shoring up the South’s ability to defend itself, even into 1968, but was ultimately unable to devise a politically acceptable military game plan that would bring North Vietnam to the negotiating table.

As Colman moves beyond Vietnam, he claims to provide “perhaps the most sympathetic general account today of Johnson’s foreign policies” (p. 4), yet his conclusions are unfailingly circumspect. He generally portrays the diplomacy of the Johnson administration as incremental rather than visionary and reactive rather than deliberate and anticipatory. Emphasizing the constraints on Johnson’s actions, Colman seeks to explain the lack of more formidable diplomatic accomplishments—not only that Vietnam dominated the president’s time and attention but also that the U.S. geopolitical position declined as a result of Soviet military parity, more assertive allies, and a U.S. economy under increasing strain from a “guns and butter” economic policy approach.

Colman argues that Johnson’s greatest diplomatic successes involved dealing with the challenges of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) “in ways that left the alliance more unified in 1969 than in 1963” (p. 208). In trying to prevent war between Greece and Turkey in the gathering crisis over Cyprus in 1964, Johnson’s administration was ultimately unable to broker a negotiated solution. However, through U.S. threats and admonishments “an uneasy peace prevailed,” and NATO’s southern flank was temporarily stabilized. Johnson failed to prevent Britain’s withdrawal from East of Suez or Charles de Gaulle’s withdrawal from NATO’s integrated military com-
mand, but his diplomacy was infused with a willingness to bow gracefully to the inevitable. In the case of the French, for example, Colman praises Johnson’s “restraint and courtesy towards de Gaulle,” which “minimized the strains in the Franco-American relationship” (p. 89). More substantively, on the issue of nuclear sharing with the Federal Republic of Germany Johnson adeptly took the lead within his own administration in finally abandoning support for the Multi-Lateral Force concept, which was highly unpopular with the British, the French, and the Soviet Union, and in convincing the West Germans that their nuclear aspirations could be better addressed in the context of a NATO nuclear planning body.

Colman makes a strong case that Johnson in his tentative steps toward improving relations with the Soviet Union (and to a much lesser degree even the Chinese) established a “nascent détente” and paved the way for future triangular diplomacy. This was reflected in many small agreements as well as one significant accomplishment, the Soviet signing of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Johnson also took the initiative in proposing strategic arms control negotiations, which eventually led to the first Strategic Arms Limitation Talks during the Nixon administration. Colman characterizes the U.S.-Soviet relationship as one of “low key progress” (p. 132), and notes that Vietnam was an intractable obstacle to any breakthroughs in détente with either Communist power.

Johnson is given a more mixed scorecard in his approach to the 1967 war in the Middle East, his broad policies toward Latin America, and his attempts to patch up the postwar Bretton Woods system of fixed exchange rates and dollar convertibility into gold. In the first instance, Johnson adopted a stance of “biased non-belligerence” (p. 153), at first attempting to prevent an Israeli preemptive attack and then deftly putting the United States on the side of Israel when war ensued, all the while avoiding a superpower confrontation. In Latin America, Colman is critical of Johnson’s unwillingness to break away from the historical U.S. support for economic but not political modernization. Johnson “did not bring much flair, ambition or imagination to US policy” in Latin America (p. 181). Finally, in the international monetary sphere, Johnson’s efforts to salvage Bretton Woods through, among other things, trying to reduce chronic U.S. balance of payments deficits were “more reactive, ad hoc improvisations than visionary blueprints for viable, long term reform” (p. 199), although they did provide a temporary respite from an impending crisis that eventually doomed the system.

Throughout this book, Colman makes extensive use of primary documents from U.S. and British archives to build a persuasive, nuanced case that Johnson in his statecraft was engaged, capable, and guided by a willingness to consider diverse opinions. He had an ability at times to go against the recommendations of his most senior advisers to good effect, and Colman praises the “general caution and prudence with which [Johnson] tended to approach foreign policy issues” (p. 157).

Reviewed by Marilyn B. Young, New York University

Andrew Johns’s account of the domestic political history of the Republican Party during the war in Vietnam makes for deeply depressing reading. Moreover, the story he tells about the Democrats does not lighten the mood. From John F. Kennedy to Richard M. Nixon, all the presidents who made war suffered one major anxiety: not how to contain China, North Vietnam, or Communism in Southeast Asia (or indeed whether these were worthy goals) but only how to contain the bad news from the battlefront. “We don’t have a prayer of staying in Vietnam,” Kennedy said—privately, of course. “Those people hate us. They are going to throw our asses out of there at almost any point. But I can’t give up a piece of territory like that to the Communists and get the American people to re-elect me” (p. 31). “God Almighty,” Lyndon B. Johnson moaned to John Knight (among many others), “what they said about us leaving China would be just warming up compared to what they’d say now” (p. 48). God Almighty, one wishes one could respond, are you seriously balancing millions of lives against what Republican critics might say? The answer is always yes, though that is hardly the only possible response. Surely Knight might have responded: yes, they did say that about losing China, but Kennedy went on to defeat the candidate who said it most loudly. The full irony of Johnson’s lament would become apparent in 1972.

Johns’s focus on what Republican critics were saying about Vietnam constitutes an extended review of the role played by domestic American politics in the destruction of Vietnam. I want to put it this starkly because often scholarly debates about Vietnam allow the war itself to drop out of sight. It is important to note the extent to which U.S. politicians protected themselves from knowledge of the war on the ground so as to pursue politics as usual; it is crucial that scholarly analysis not imitate them.

Vietnam did not become a major issue for the Republicans during the Kennedy administration because they preferred to focus on the president’s perceived failures in Cuba, Berlin, and Laos. Nor did all Republicans criticize Johnson’s handling of the war. In April 1964, John Sherman Cooper, the Republican senator from Kentucky, who had opposed U.S. involvement in Southeast Asia since the mid-1950s, called for the reconvening of the Geneva conference as the first step in disengagement. Johnson’s response to Cooper remained his response to such appeals throughout his presidency: “Neither Johnson nor his advisers paid much attention to those in either party like Cooper (or U.S. allies, for that matter) who urged reducing the American commitment or pursuing some sort of mediated settlement” (p. 53).

To whom, then, did these presidents pay attention? In Johns’s view not the anti-war movement (possibly for this reason he does not discuss the movement at any length) but the “right-wing monster” lurking at the door. Johns’s response to historians who find such fears exaggerated is to point out that, real or imagined, Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon believed they were real and acted on their beliefs. The “anxiety
about a right-wing backlash” displayed by all three war presidents “reflected the extensive and serious criticism emanating from conservatives.” “The war was fought on two fronts,” Johns writes, “with actions in Southeast Asia invariably affecting the political battlefield at home, and vice versa” (p. 328). However, he does not discuss the situation on the ground in Vietnam in any detail, making it difficult to tell with any precision how, or even whether, the two fronts interacted.

To be fair, the war as such is not Johns’s subject. His subject is what Republicans had to say about it, and he tells this story in impressive detail. The reader learns a good deal about the role of Melvin Laird, George Romney, Nelson Rockefeller, Barry Goldwater, and the rest of the gang. Most surprising is Johns’s account of Dwight Eisenhower. Apparently less fearful of the military-industrial complex than he was when he left office, Eisenhower urged escalation at every opportunity, calling on Congress to declare war on North Vietnam as well as hot pursuit of North Vietnamese troops into Cambodia and Laos. Eisenhower “simply could not understand why the importance of South Vietnam and the correct strategy for victory were not as apparent to everyone else as they were to him” (p. 187). Eisenhower blamed the failure of negotiations with Hanoi on the antiwar movement and in the best bipartisan fashion called for unity on the home front in order to win the war.

One of the virtues of Johns’s study is its clarity about the complicity of Congress in the war. Usually seen as passive or at most modestly enabling, Congress was in fact an active participant. “Congress actively fostered the environment that led to these decisions: overwhelmingly approving the Tonkin Gulf resolution, continually authorizing massive military expenditures, and sanctioning a presidential war by failing to exercise its own prerogatives” (p. 333).

The Republican doves never achieved the influence the hawks exercised. The latter supported Johnson’s war policies, calling only for steady increases of force. Johns concludes that the rhetoric of this cohort—which included Nixon himself, Eisenhower, Goldwater, Gerald Ford, and John Tower—made it “virtually impossible for Johnson, and later, Nixon, to take any meaningful steps toward a negotiated settlement or even withdrawal from Vietnam” (p. 336). I am not sure why withdrawal was an “even,” inasmuch as negotiations were surely always about the withdrawal of U.S. troops. More fundamentally, although Johns fully describes the spectrum of Republican views on Vietnam, he never quite explains why all three presidents consistently chose to listen only to those who supported the war. What is it about U.S. politicians that leads them to choose their political futures over the lives of others? What is it about the system itself that militates for war? Johns’s book does not answer these questions, but it raises them very effectively.

Reviewed by Robert D. Walk, Independent Chemical Warfare Defense Trainer (U.S. Army, ret.)

Chemical weaponry (CW) has a sinister reputation. Since the beginning of the modern era of chemical warfare in 1915, it has been demonized for its “inhumane” characteristics. The use of CW in the First World War helped to cement its vile reputation. Poetry and literature characterized the use of gas as horrible and inhumane, which is interesting in light of the effects of other weapons on the human body. The bad reputation of CW, as well as the perception of a lack of advantage because of the preparedness of all major combatants, helped prevent the use of gas in World War II except in relatively limited situations against ill-prepared combatants (Ethiopia and China) and prisoners (Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan). On the other hand, the invention and use of the chemical agent DDT, an insecticide, reduced non-battle sickness and helped ensure victory for the Allies. When and where necessary, out-of-control mobs rioting against conscription were controlled in part through the use of CN (tear gas).

Entering Vietnam, the United States had an extensive arsenal of both lethal and non-lethal chemical (and biological) agents with substantial means of delivery. As D. Hank Ellison points out, however, the United States was initially reluctant to use any agents, lethal or not, because of possible adverse publicity. At first hesitantly and then vigorously the United States used riot-control agents (RCA) in combat.

Although I enjoyed Ellison’s book overall, my main reservations are about its readability. The use of both an introduction and a “prelude” seems problematic. The introduction lays out the book’s theme and provides a short historical review of CW and international efforts to limit it up to the Vietnam War. The introduction ends with a brief discussion of how U.S. use of RCA in Vietnam provided a case study that could be of use to modern leaders: Did the widespread availability and use of RCA cause the U.S. government to slide down the slippery slope into full lethal CW use? Did U.S. forces use lethal chemical agents? If not, why not? These questions come up again later in the book.

The prelude discusses herbicide use, early use of RCA by South Vietnam, and the military decision-making process. The description of the interactions at the highest levels in the U.S. and South Vietnamese governments in deciding to use RCA in combat is fascinating, even though the decision was ultimately futile. The use of both an introduction and a prelude works reasonably well, but I found myself wishing that the author had put the historical background information into the introduction and referred to it later in the book when appropriate.

The chapters are separated by topic (Operation Stomp, tunnels, etc.), roughly in chronologic order. Operation Stomp showed that, despite the best intentions at the highest levels, actions on the ground can have a strategic impact. U.S. Marines used RCA in combat because they believed that such agents would minimize collateral civilian casualties. The descriptions of combat actions involving RCA are the best part
of the book, highlighting the adaptability of soldiers and marines to counterinsurgency operations that attempt to minimize both friendly and civilian casualties. The biggest distraction is the author’s willingness to end one chapter in 1968 and start the next back in 1966. Proper transitions would have helped readers immensely.

In the conclusion, Ellison discusses the effectiveness of RCA in the Vietnam conflict and the U.S. government’s concern about public perceptions of RCA use, and he returns to questions he posed in the introduction. No solid evidence has emerged that U.S. forces used lethal agents or the incapacitating agent BZ in Vietnam, despite occasional outcries. The toxic legacy of the use of herbicides overshadows the possible damage caused by anything else.

Appendices provide readers with additional information on CW. Appendix A, providing technical data on CW agents, is reasonably accurate and well written—I learned something I did not know in that appendix. Appendix B, “U.S. Munitions and Weapons Systems,” is also informative and reasonably well-written, and so is Appendix C, “Viet Cong Improvised Munitions,” although I wish the author had tried to use Vietnamese sources as well as U.S. intelligence documents. Appendix D, “Protective Masks,” is reasonably well-written, but incomplete. As a result of using RCA, the United States tried at least one other experimental protective mask for such agents, the XM27, which was effectively a silicone M17 mask with filter elements usable only against RCA. Although the XM27 worked, its successor, the XM28, was more appropriate for the conditions and so was developed further. In addition, prior to the early 1960s, Experimental Chemical Corps equipment was designated with an E-prefix rather than an X-, which also carried over into the device field, the E49 and E158 being examples of masks used in Vietnam.

On the whole, I found the book engaging and readable with some limitations. As a long-time CW officer in the U.S. Army, I eagerly looked forward to reading this book and was generally pleased with the result. Although Ellison does not provide a perfect study of CW in Vietnam, I recommend the book for its excellent depiction of the use of RCAs in combat.


Reviewed by Robert H. Lieshout, Radboud University (Netherlands)

This book provides an account that “stands in stark contrast to conventional wisdom” (p. 10) and can be summarized in a few sentences. In a theoretical chapter Rosato develops an argument about when states decide to surrender sovereignty. They will do so only when they are confronted by an overwhelming opponent and stand a chance to resist if they combine their forces. This will involve the establishment of a central authority—will lead to integration—if the balance of power between the leading powers in this combination is more or less even. This hypothesis is subsequently “tested”
against the European unification process in the 1950s in three historical chapters on
the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), the European Defense Commen-
ty (EDC), and the European Economic Community (EEC). The evidence pre-
sented by Rosato supports his theory and allows him to demonstrate, to his own satis-
faction, that his theory performs better than its two rivals, Andrew Moravcsik's
commercial explanation and Craig Parsons's ideational thesis. In the final chapter
Rosato, apparently encouraged by the abundance of confirmations in the previous
chapters, confidently predicts that, because the Soviet Union has disappeared, the Eu-
ropean project is doomed. The Europeans “no longer have a compelling geostrategic
reason either to pursue further integration or to preserve their existing community”
(p. 245).

Rosato's book presents a perfect example of everything that can go wrong if his-
tory is not taken seriously and employed merely as a grab bag. The grab bag serves as a
handy source for quotations that fit your theoretical predictions and as a useful reposi-
tory for the ones that do not. Small wonder that Rosato time and again can conclude
that “the evidence presented . . . lends powerful support to my argument” (p. 103).
Rosato claims that his research has been an exercise in process tracing, but this reader
is left with the impression that Rosato did not even bother to examine the actual ne-
gotiations between and within the countries involved. This leads to gross misrepresen-
tations of what really happened, in particular regarding the active role played by the
United States (pace Rosato, U.S. officials did push for integration), the extent to
which France and West Germany were internally deeply divided over the three pro-
jects, and the extent to which the Soviet threat weighed in their considerations. For
reasons of space I limit myself to a few examples, taken from each integration project.

With respect to the ECSC, according to Rosato the French and the West Ger-
mans agreed that pooling their coal and steel industries created a balancing coalition
that could stand up to the Soviet Union and serve as a balance between themselves.
Against the background of the U.S. security guarantee, it was therefore, after the
launch of the Schuman Plan in May 1950, “only a matter of time before the two sides
ironed out the details” (p. 3). Although I fully agree with Rosato that the ECSC was
all about power politics, it was not about balancing against an overwhelming Soviet
threat. The ECSC was about giving France control over West Germany's coal and steel
industry for the foreseeable future. Notwithstanding the obvious importance of this
objective for France's future power position, the French cabinet counted many oppo-
nents of Jean Monnet's supranational scheme—its launch took them more or less by
surprise—and the enmity of the French Foreign Office ensured that Minister of For-
eign Affairs Robert Schuman entrusted the actual negotiations not to his own diplo-
mats but to Monnet and his staff at the Planning Commissariat. In West Germany,
Economics Minister Ludwig Erhard and representatives of heavy industry and the la-
bor unions were effective in opposing the project. Rosato seems not to have noticed
that the negotiations on the ECSC were deadlocked from December 1950 until
March 1951 and that France and West Germany were not able to break this deadlock
on their own. It required active intervention by the United States on the side of France
to bring the negotiations to a successful conclusion. Finally, in what way can the
ECSC’s feeble High Authority, with its limited powers and poor track record after it started operating, be regarded as an effective counterweight to what Konrad Adenauer dubbed the “giant communist colossus”?

Regarding the EDC, the obvious problem for Rosato’s theory is that the French National Assembly rejected the supranational community in August 1954 in spite of the overwhelming Soviet threat. However, we are assured that “French behavior in the defense community case does not contradict the logic of my argument” (p. 151). Rosato accomplishes this feat by presenting an elaborate and convoluted explanation of why this could happen (pp. 152–153), but he fails to provide any supportive quotations. This time, even history’s grab bag could not assist him. And that is not all. Rosato also fails to mention that the deadlocked negotiations over what was to become the EDC were saved in the early summer of 1951 by the United States, which again actively intervened on the side of the French. He also ignores that a majority in the National Assembly was simply against German rearmament, no matter how threatening the Soviet menace (something that also renders implausible Rosato’s hypothetical military power ratio calculation: The French were dead set against permitting West Germany “to devote the same fraction of its population as France to raising military forces,” p. 108). The only way out of this quagmire that French Prime Minister Pierre Mendès-France could think of was the revival of the Brussels Treaty Organization (BTO), enlarged with West Germany and Italy, and supplemented with an organ that would control the troops and armament levels of its members on the continent—leaving France and the United Kingdom a free hand in their overseas territories. That is, Mendès-France’s only worry was somehow to placate the majority in the National Assembly and to get them to agree to West German rearmament. The last thing on his mind was to lay “the foundation for a formidable west European coalition” (p. 150). Indeed, when Mendès-France explained the scheme to the French ambassadors in Western capitals, he did not even mention the Soviet threat but did emphasize that France’s allies agreed that West Germany’s entry into the North Atlantic Treaty Organization presented a danger to France.

Concerning the EEC, the first problem is that Rosato, quoting Parsons, claims that Euratom was merely a sideshow (“a minor collaboration”) and was of little importance to French and West German decision-makers. This sets him on the wrong track, inasmuch as the two treaties had been clearly linked (“das Junktim”) by West Germany, and for France Euratom constituted the major prize. The French saw Euratom not as a means to strengthen the common defense against the Soviet Union but as yet another instrument to control West Germany, this time with respect to the latter’s nuclear industry. This prospect is what induced French leaders to begin to think about what was until then unthinkable—that France would join a European common market—and it made West German Minister for Nuclear Affairs Franz-Josef Strauss work very hard to prevent such an outcome. Strauss’s activities, however, came to nothing because the United States left no doubt there would be no bilateral agreements between West Germany and the United States on the development of a West German nuclear industry and that the European option pushed by the French was the only feasible one. Although Strauss tried to wriggle out of Euratom, the French tried to do the
same with the common market until the end of June 1956. Only then did they accept
the unavoidability of the “Junktim” and start to work on a common market on French
terms. In this they were singularly successful, thanks to deep divisions within West
Germany concerning the common market. In Rosato’s view, the West Germans de-
sired economic integration (see p. 188), and because of this the project was barely de-
bated among West German policymakers, leading a fierce opponent such as Erhard to
find little support for his views (see pp. 203–204). This is the opposite of what actu-
ally took place. Rosato should have known better. He refers to Elizabeth Mahant’s
Birthmarks of Europe: The Origins of the European Community Reconsidered (Basing-
stoke, UK: Ashgate, 2004), but he conveniently leaves in history’s grab bag her obser-
vations that “the German government was in a constant state of internal warfare, with
ministries fighting it out over various European issues” and that “the lack of cohesion
was such that it is surprising the German negotiators were able to protect any German
interests.” Rosato also does not mention that Adenauer, after the negotiations on the
common market and Euratom had broken down at the end of October, instructed
Erhard to approach Harold Macmillan, the British chancellor of the exchequer, to
start discussions on a free trade zone. A final example of selective quoting relates
to Rosato’s claim that Adenauer was a firm and unwavering advocate of a centralized,
integrated Europe. Rosato makes use of Adenauer’s speech in Brussels in September
1956 to demonstrate that the Soviet danger was foremost on Adenauer’s mind
(pp. 197–198), but Rosato ignores the fact that Adenauer in that same speech dis-
tanced himself from the advocates of integration and warned that not all European in-
stitutions must necessarily be supranational in character.

Progress in empirical science is achieved neither by collecting as many confirma-
tions for a theory as possible nor by ignoring unwelcome counterevidence. Rosato
should take cold comfort in Kenneth Waltz’s appreciative blurb on the book’s jacket.
If anyone has made clear that he cannot be bothered with historical accuracy (or “dipl-
momatic lore,” as Waltz put it in an article published in the American Political Science
Review in 1997), it is the author of Theory of International Politics. It is a questionable
honor to have passed Waltz’s test of seriousness.

Eric Remacle and Pascaline Winand, eds., America, Europe, Africa / L’Amérique,

Reviewed by Charles Cogan, Harvard University

By the early twentieth century, Europe, which had dominated the world for four cen-
turies through conquest and colonization, had proven ultimately unable to manage it-
self. Although the peace of Westphalia in the seventeenth century and the Concert of
Europe in the nineteenth century had ushered in periods of peace after devastating
years of struggles and upheavals, renewed strife and technological advances brought
the European system down, initially with World War I and then with World War II.
By 1945, Germany was at “year zero”; France was afflicted with, in the words of Charles de Gaulle, “a secret grief that would remain forever in the nation's conscience”; and Britain, exhausted after more than four years of warfare, had lost its great-power status and was about to lose its empire. None of these three major powers of Western Europe was fully disposed to embrace the others and forge a new unity for the Old Continent.

The greatest accomplishment of the European Economic Community (now the European Union) was to break the cycle of French-German enmity through a hybrid arrangement of pooled economic functions (communitarianism) and a revival of something like the Concert of Europe through the European Council (intergovernmentalism).

But although the European Union in the aggregate has become an economic powerhouse, it has remained a military—and to a lesser extent political—dwarf. The history of the Western European Union (WEU) and its predecessor, the Western Union, is that of Europe's attempt to develop a common European foreign and defense policy without the resources or the collective will to carry it out, hampered as it was by France's ambition to become the dominant player in European defense, by Britain's distaste for continental arrangements and its attachment to its “special relationship” with the United States, and by Germany's pathological aversion to its past history of extreme militarism. But given Germany's “spiritual paralysis,” in the words of the former U.S. ambassador in Berlin, John Kornblum, the fault ultimately has lain with the inability of France and Britain, despite moments of promise, such as the “spirit of St. Malo” in 1998, to come together on European defense, a condition that persists today. The WEU, discussed in an essay by Eric Remacle (pp. 187–234), one of the two editors of the book under review, effectively ceased to exist in 2010, and its functions were absorbed into the European Union.

Europe could have had an institutional base for its own defense had France not rejected the European Defense Community (EDC) in 1954. The EDC, an idea that was ahead of its time, would have communitarianized defense. For example, the EDC would have had, like the European Coal and Steel Community before it, a parliamentary assembly. As Gérard Bossuat points out in his essay, pro-European circles in the United States believed “the [EDC was] a project with enormous political, economic and cultural potential” (p. 115). The EDC, the brainchild of Jean Monnet, was supported in France by the Christian Democrats (known as the Mouvement Républicain Populaire because no party with the label “Christian” can make headway in Republican France) and a segment of the Socialist Party. The other segment of the Socialist Party joined with the Gaullists and the Communists in rejecting the EDC on nationalist grounds.

The title of the book reflects its syncretism: it is constructed around the imposing figure of the late Alfred Cahen. Some of the authors were his students, although this is not a Festschrift per se (too few people are involved). A Belgian diplomat and academic, Cahen was in the tradition of a grand commis d'état. In earlier times, when both he and I were second secretaries in then-Léopoldville, he as a diplomat and I as
an intelligence officer, he once remarked to me, and to the honor of Belgium, that he
never felt comfortable unless it was raining.

The heteroclite nature of the book is a reflection of Ambassador Cahen’s variety
of interests: transatlantic relations (minister in the United States, ambassador in
France); European defense (secretary general of the WEU); and Belgian interests in
Africa (he returned in the late 1960s as ambassador to the Congo ex-Belge). These
three areas of interest form, successively, the three parts of the book. The three parts
are preceded by an excellent overview of the entire period by the noted French defense
historian Pierre Gerbet (pp. 29–53).

For those scholars who are interested in the convoluted history of European de-
fense, the essays in this collection constitute a valuable resource. To give one example:
the long-running (and ultimately futile) negotiations over the Multilateral Force,
which were centered on whether at some point the Europeans would gain full inde-
pendence in the use of the nuclear weapons in the force, became intertwined in the
mid and late 1960s with the Soviet-American negotiations over the Nuclear Non-
Proliferation Treaty (NPT). As Evgeny Kuznetsov sums up matters (p. 265), “on the
one hand, the NPT prohibited the transfer of control of nuclear weapons to a fully in-
tegrated multilateral entity, such as a European defense community, in spite of its su-
pranational character. But on the other, a federated European state could succeed to
the nuclear status of one of its former components [i.e. Britain or France].”

Dirk Verheyen, *United City, Divided Memories? Cold War Legacies in Contemporary

Reviewed by Hope M. Harrison, George Washington University

In this interesting, well-written book, Dirk Verheyen provides a description of key as-
pects of Cold War history in Berlin as well as an analysis of how that history has been
commemorated. With the opening of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold War,
the East German regime and its dreaded secret police (the State Security Ministry, or
Stasi) ceased to exist, as did the Four Power occupation of Berlin by the United States,
the Soviet Union, Great Britain, and France. Examining what remains of these,
Verheyen divides his study into three parts related to the Four Power occupation, the
Stasi, and the Berlin Wall. In each part, he first summarizes the Cold War historical
developments related to each and then analyzes debates and controversies in Berlin
from 1995 to 2007 about how to handle the history and legacy of the Four Powers,
the Stasi, and the Berlin Wall and whether and how they should be highlighted in mu-
seums, memorials, and other sites.

Because Berlin was at the center of the Cold War and is full of history from ear-
lier periods as well, Verheyen has a wealth of material on which to draw. In addition,
in the aftermath of unification, Germans in public office have generally believed that
just as the West Germans came to terms with the Nazi past from the 1960s on, so must united Germany come to terms (faster this time) with the East German past, particularly its most oppressive aspects, epitomized by the Stasi and the Berlin Wall, and with the role the Four Powers played in Germany. Many Germans take seriously the process of coming to terms with the past (Geschichtsaufarbeitung or Vergangenheitsbewältigung) and believe in the importance of a culture of memory (Erinnerungskultur) and policies to promote both of these (Erinnerungspolitik), using museums, monuments, and memorials as sites of learning (Lernort) about history.

Drawing on and explaining these German concepts as well as concepts related to memorials, monuments, commemoration, and identity from anthropology, sociology, urban planning, history, and political science, Verheyen sets up his case studies very well with two introductory chapters, “A City and Nation between Memory and Future” and “Capturing Memory and Crafting Identity.” After summarizing how Germany has dealt with the Nazi past, he compares the processes of dealing with the East German and Cold War pasts with this earlier process. He also highlights the German debate after unification about whether German politicians, particularly at the federal level in the person of Chancellor Helmut Kohl, should be involved in handling history and trying to mandate some sort of “national history” concerning the period of German division and the Cold War or other periods.

The three core sections of the book provide an impressive survey of the memorial landscape related to the Cold War and East Germany and the processes and actors that have created this landscape, from local citizens’ groups to government officials. Part I on the former occupying powers describes the activities and locations of occupying forces during the Cold War and then focuses on post–Cold War memorials of the Four Powers (especially Soviet memorials to the dead in World War II), the transformation of military and civilian facilities and airports, the creation of the Allied Museum in 1994 (in honor of the U.S., British, and French soldiers who served in West Berlin), and the creation of the Berlin-Karlshorst Museum in 1995 (highlighting the Soviet role in the defeat of Germany).

Part II examines the history of the Stasi in East Germany and the two key Stasi sites in Berlin preserved by united Germany: the old Stasi headquarters at Normannenstrasse and the memorial/exhibit at the main Stasi prison at Hohenschönhausen. Part III looks at the history of the Berlin Wall from 1961 to 1989, its popularity with tourists before and particularly after it was breached, and how the Wall has been commemorated at the Checkpoint Charlie Museum, the East Side Gallery, the Berlin Wall Memorial at Bernauer Strasse, and other sites.

Not surprisingly, in a city in which there is so much popular, political, and tourist attention to history, commemoration of the three areas discussed by Verheyen has continued to evolve since he completed his book. Tempelhof, the main airport in the American sector of Berlin and the symbol of the successful airlift of 1948–1949, has been closed and will likely be the future home of an expanded version of the Allied Museum recast as a “Museum of Freedom” with a broader Cold War focus. The Federal Authority on Stasi Records has opened a new Education Center in central Berlin with a new permanent exhibit, Stasi—Die Ausstellung zur DDR Staatssicherheit.
A new exhibit is also planned for the former Stasi prison at Hohenschönhausen. Finally, the government has devoted much greater attention to the history of the Berlin Wall than was the case when Verheyen conducted his research, as evidenced by the Comprehensive Plan for Commemorating the Berlin Wall approved by the Berlin Senate with funding of €40 million in 2006 (which Verheyen strangely ignores, p. 257). This plan has resulted in a vast expansion and improvement of the Berlin Wall Memorial at Bernauer Strasse (making it no longer the case that, as Verheyen argues, the Checkpoint Charlie Museum contains the only comprehensive examination of the Wall, p. 235) and funding for other sites related to the Wall, including plaques marking where East Germans were killed trying to escape across the Wall. The twentieth anniversary of the opening of the Wall in 2009 and the fiftieth anniversary of the erection of the Wall in 2011 also saw intense public focus on the legacies of the Cold War and the Berlin Wall and further development of sites of memory related to them, as I discuss in “The Berlin Wall and its Resurrection as a Site of Memory,” *German Politics and Society*, Vol. 29, No. 2 (Summer 2011), pp. 78–106 and in my forthcoming book on post-1989 commemorations of the Wall.

Among the deeper issues at play in the debates about commemorating various aspects of the Cold War and the division of Germany is the issue of Germans as perpetrators or victims. The previous intensive focus on Germans as perpetrators of the Holocaust affects the German approach to commemorations of the Cold War and the East German regime. For some, the Nazi past leads to a commitment to recognize the atrocities carried out by the “second German dictatorship of the twentieth century,” that of the German Democratic Republic (GDR), particularly by the Stasi and by the border guards and their superiors at the Berlin Wall, and to favor policies for acknowledging, honoring, and compensating the victims. Others resent any comparison between the Nazi and Communist regimes and their victims, arguing that such a comparison serves to relativize the Holocaust. Yet another group feels that essentially all Germans were victims in the Cold War because of the division of the country and the role of the Four Powers. People who were punished for their lack of support of the GDR regime, on the other hand, argue that blaming “the Cold War” for their suffering lets off the hardline East German leaders much too easily. Verheyen’s book provides much context for the ongoing acrimonious German debates about how to handle Cold War and East German history.

Indeed, since 2010 an intensely politicized debate has been under way about the Berlin Senate’s plans (drafted in 2006 by a ruling Social Democratic-Left coalition) to create a Cold War Museum at a new site at Checkpoint Charlie. The Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and GDR victims’ groups fear that any museum devoted to the Cold War risks portraying the two Cold War superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union, as equivalent, instead of highlighting the Cold War as a struggle for freedom championed by the West and resisted by the Soviet bloc. Former victims also worry that such a museum is likely to focus on superpower politics and absolve the East German government of blame for the harsh conditions many of the regime’s critics endured. The international group of historians (of which this author is one) in-
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volved in planning the creation of this museum aims to put the experiences of Berliners and Germans during the Cold War into the global context of that era using the results of scholarly research into the Cold War in Europe, Asia, Latin America, Africa, and other regions. Whether a dispassionate, broad approach to the Cold War can be successful in the emotional, politicized climate of Berlin remains to be seen, although a good start has been made with a small exhibit in the new Black Box Kalter Krieg (Cold War) at Checkpoint Charlie, opened in September 2012. Verheyen's book provides very useful background for understanding why this is such a challenge. Students and scholars seeking to comprehend the intersection of history, politics, identity, and commemoration in Berlin will enjoy this book.


Reviewed by Thomas Wegener-Friis, University of South Denmark, Odense

Besides bringing the Communist regime in East Germany to an end, the largest political achievement of the civic movement of the former German Democratic Republic (GDR) was the establishment of the Stasi archives under a Federal Commissioner (BStU). If the politicians in the East and West did not have to take anybody else into consideration, the files of the repression apparatus would have been safely stored away in the Federal Archives for a very long time. In the summer of 1990, however, East German protesters took to the streets as they had done during the peaceful revolution in the fall of 1989. This time they demanded access to “their files.” The German politicians gave in to the pressure, reopened the otherwise already finished agreement on reunification, and appeased the protesters.

The opening of the Stasi files was a historical and political revolution. It showed that the files of the former secret police could be made transparent without risking another “night of long knives.” Opening the files prevented the networks of Stasi informants and personnel from reorganizing within the framework of the democratic state and becoming a threat to the transition process. The opening revealed, in minutest detail, how a Soviet-bloc secret police service actually functioned. The disclosure of crucial evidence from the Stasi archives showed other countries in East and Central Europe how to deal with their difficult past. Today most of the former East bloc countries have followed suit, albeit to varying degrees.

Since the official establishment of the Stasi archives in 1991, access for researchers has resulted in a flood of publications about the Stasi. These publications cover almost every aspect of the feared secret police, from its surveillance of individuals opposing the regime to its role in the development of East German railways, agriculture, and uranium mining. The Stasi’s activities have been scrutinized on every administrative level. Books have been written about the individual main departments of the ministry in Berlin, about the regional branches (Bezirksverwaltungen) of the state security,
and about the local Stasi in the districts (Kreisdienststellen). The local Stasi counted 217 offices and covered the whole republic. No rural district was so remote or quiet that the Stasi did not need to know exactly what went on in the heads of the citizens there. The class enemy could strike at any time, and the German heirs of Feliks Dzerzhinskii needed to be on their toes everywhere and at all times. Several of these districts have had their Stasi histories written. For example, Greiz, Meiningen, and Eisenach are examined in Helmut Müller-Enbergs, Die Kreisdienststelle Greiz und ihr inoffizielles Netz (Erfurt, Germany: Landesbeauftragte des Freistaates Thüringen, 2011); Helmut Müller-Enbergs and Tom Pleiner, Die Kreisdienststelle Meiningen des Staatssicherheitsdienstes: Eine Handreichung zur regionalen Aufarbeitung (Berlin: BStU, 2012); and Helmut Müller-Enbergs, Die Kreisdienststelle Eisenach und ihr inoffizielles Netz (Erfurt, Germany: Landesbeauftragte des Freistaates Thüringen, 2010).

The Canadian historian Gary Bruce also looks closely at the Stasi at the local level. However, his objective is somewhat different from that of his German colleagues. Whereas German historians try to write local history, Bruce wants to understand how the mechanisms of repression worked in the “first workers and peasants’ state on German soil.” The Stasi, after all, were not just a machine with 91,000 employees who maintained constant surveillance. Bruce thus uses the two East German districts Gransee and Perleberg as case studies to make his work more tangible. Gransee was a small rural district in the Potsdam region near Berlin, and Perleberg was a typical province district with two middle-size towns, Wittenberge and Perleberg. The density of Stasi coverage in the districts was close to the GDR average. In the Perleberg district, one of every 66 citizens aged 18 to 65 was a Stasi informant. In Gransee the ratio was one of every 65.

The number of agents in the GDR was extremely high even compared to other Warsaw Pact countries, with the exception of Romania. The GDR also had more “security” issues than the other East-bloc countries. The Stasi provided the first line of defense against “attempts to flee the republic” (Republikflucht). The Stasi was able to track down and arrest individuals who were planning to escape the GDR. The Stasi was the buffer between the large contingent of Soviet military forces and the local population and was able to secure the power monopoly of the East German Communists by cracking down on civic unrest or resistance before it became a problem. To achieve this, the secret police had (almost) unending resources. Only when the Communist states were going bankrupt in the late 1980s did the until-then-untamed growth of the Stasi slow down.

Bruce provides a lucid overview of the ever-growing research on, and German public discussions of, the GDR and Stasi. The Firm is the product of an impressive archival research effort, using files from both the Stasi archives and the archives of the former Communist party in the two districts. The files of the Stasi office in Perleberg amount to 137 meters, whereas the Gransee files come to “only” 11.9 meters. To support his written sources, Bruce interviewed citizens of the two districts, as well as former Stasi officers. This last source is by no means uncontroversial in Germany. However, Bruce makes good use of the interviews in the chapter “In the Service of the
Firm.” The statements of the former Stasi officers are often apologetic, but they give valuable insight into what happened to these people when the GDR collapsed.

A question that frequently comes up in the book is whether the Stasi did an effective job—a question that is hard to answer. One possibility is to look at the informants. Bruce emphasizes that the local Stasi officers spent too much time relying on agents who achieved little, just for the sake of meeting planned economic goals. Thus the high number of agents did not necessarily guarantee a sound evaluation of the mood of the GDR population. Another way to measure success or failure is to see whether the Stasi met its ultimate goal; namely, to secure the Communist hold on power. The revolution of 1989 meant the total defeat of the Stasi, including the disbandment of the agency soon after the opening of the Berlin Wall. The peaceful revolution revealed a fundamental problem with the East German model, namely that “the Stasi was only as effective as its political masters.” Regardless of the number of state security officers, if the Communist party was unable to withstand political and economic challenges, the Stasi would not be able to retain power. In the end, the party did not have the answers. In Perleberg district the only answer the first secretary of the party, Gerhard Uhe, had was suicide.

The Firm is notable for its high level of knowledge of German research and excellent source material. Gary Bruce’s book is one of the finest English-language works on the subject, offering an astute analysis of the Communist repressive apparatus in the post-Stalin era.


Reviewed by Ruud van Dijk, University of Amsterdam

This exceptionally useful volume by Mike Dennis and Norman LaPorte deals with a topic that not only forms an important part of the history of the German Democratic Republic (GDR), but also tells us a good deal about the nature of the Communist regime there, its obsessions, and the relative reach of its state apparatus. Using their own research in local, state, party, and national archives of the former GDR (including those of the Ministry for State Security, or Stasi) alongside much recent German-language scholarship, Dennis and LaPorte have delivered a series of essays that will be useful for both scholars and students. Next to the original research that has gone into them, the essays also provide context and historical background to make the material accessible for non-specialists.

The authors’ ambition is greater than providing an English-language introduction to the way the East German regime tried to control and in some cases “operationally decompose” (p. 68) prominent non-compliant minority groups, and the ways these groups resisted. As Dennis and LaPorte discuss in the first chapter, they also seek to demonstrate that rather than plain “totalitarian,” the regime dominated by the So-
cialist Unity Party of Germany (SED) can be more usefully characterized as “post-totalitarian.” The SED police state was intolerant and often nasty, and it aimed to be in full control of society, as witnessed by the mushrooming Stasi apparatus, especially after the building of the Berlin Wall in 1961. In practice, however, the SED also had to rely for its survival on a modus vivendi with the population, including minority groups (a quest that was ultimately unsuccessful).

A quick look at the conclusion may give the impression that Dennis and LaPorte see so much complexity and ambiguity that the criminal nature of the SED state falls by the wayside. Any depiction of the system, they say, “should embrace the intersecting and shifting layers of complicity, accommodation, retreat, cooperation, idealism and human agency typical of the experiences and actions of the wide range of minorities explored in this book” (p. 203). However, none of the chapters confirms such an impression. Rather, the case studies Dennis and LaPorte present make clear that although the regime ardently aspired to totalitarian control, this goal proved overly ambitious and impractical. The state apparatus was not up to the job because of a surfeit of repressive assignments, incompetence, and durable resistance by large sections of the population. One of the main strengths of the book is that it shows, on the one hand, the state’s efforts to control groups that tried to foster an identity or ideology separate from its own, and, on the other, how these efforts rarely, if ever, managed to meet the goals the regime set for itself.

Together, the minority groups that are covered in the individual chapters did constitute a sizeable, albeit heterogeneous, chunk of GDR society, especially in the 1970s and 1980s. Dennis and LaPorte have chosen groups that at first sight had relatively little in common: Jews, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Asian and African workers, soccer fans and hooligans, punks, and skinheads. What they did share was that they all defined themselves in contrast—though not always immediately also in opposition—to the Communist state. Jews and Jehovah’s Witnesses did so for religious reasons; Mozambican and Vietnamese guest workers especially set themselves apart through their independent economic activities outside regular work hours; the soccer fans, punks, and skinheads, for all their mutual differences and conflict, insisted on a separate cultural identity, although politics came to play a large role in it, especially in the case of the skinheads.

In taking an independent stance, these groups automatically represented a threat to the state, at least as viewed by the SED regime, which believed that non-compliance indicated not just opposition, but also complicity with the hostile West. Researching state strategies for dealing with all these groups (and their internal justifications), the authors invariably found evidence that the East German authorities perceived such a link. From the regime’s perspective, any kind of religious, economic, or cultural independence inside the GDR must have been instigated by the West.

Finally, when faced with state pressure to conform, all groups resisted and managed to a greater or lesser extent to hold their own. The individual stories vary greatly, both in the intensity of the repression the respective minority groups faced and in the way groups or members responded to government policies. In the aftermath of Iosif Stalin’s anti-Semitic campaign after 1949, Jewish communities in the GDR were “lit-
tle more than exhibits in a socialist museum” (p. 38), but these same moribund communities benefited in the 1980s from the regime’s desire for better relations with the United States. Jehovah’s Witnesses probably experienced the worst treatment because of their principled and organized resistance to the state’s pressure to submit and their ties to coreligionists in the West. Unlike other groups, they were banned and faced harsh persecution. Dennis and LaPorte argue that the incarceration of Jehovah’s Witness conscientious objectors was “one of the darkest chapters in the history of the GDR” (p. 78). In the 1970s and 1980s the outside world, especially the West, or the example of the West, did begin to intrude more and more into the GDR. However, football fans and hooligans, punks, and skinheads derived their energy just as much from local circumstances, whether hatred of Stasi chief Erich Mielke’s team BFC Dynamo, youth alienation from GDR society and a desire for autonomy, or nationalist, right-wing extremism.

The SED regime exacerbated many of the challenges it faced in dealing with its citizens. As Dennis and LaPorte point out, the regime had built an insular, intolerant, militarized, anti-Western, authoritarian society in which there had been no honest effort to master the past, especially Germany’s recent history. No wonder many GDR citizens, especially from minority groups with a strong sense of their own identity, would not comply. Perhaps it goes too far to dismiss the GDR as a mere footnote to world history, as Hans-Ulrich Wehler has done. However, after reading this rich collection of essays, one is struck by the misguidedness and futility of it all. The volume itself is anything but futile or misguided. On the contrary, through its careful depiction of the complex relationships between the regime and important minority groups, it throws much light on how the GDR functioned and why it ultimately collapsed.

John Kent, America, the UN and Decolonisation: Cold War Conflict in the Congo. London: Routledge, 2010. 244 pp.

Reviewed by Crawford Young, University of Wisconsin-Madison

This compact, dense monograph provides remarkably thorough coverage of U.S. policy in the Congo (Kinshasa) from the achievement of independence in 1960 until mid-1964. The United Nations (UN) operation, at the time unprecedented in scope and cost, is a secondary focus; its time frame of July 1960 until June 1964 apparently sets the temporal parameters of the volume. Congo decolonization and the turbulent politics of the immediate independence period provide the stage and background scenery for the detailed diplomatic narrative.

Some previous authors, notably Madeleine Kalb (The Congo Cables: The Cold War in Africa—from Eisenhower to Kennedy, 1982), Richard Mahoney (JFK: Ordeal in Africa, 1983), and Sean Kelly (America’s Tyrant: The CIA and Mobutu of Zaire, 1993) had earlier covered this ground, both through interviews with principals and declassification of some documents. The station chief of the U.S. Central Intelligence
Agency (CIA) during these eventful years, Larry Devlin, recently produced a frank if self-serving account (Chief of Station, Congo: A Memoir of 1960–67, 2007). Add to these well-documented works the very large academic literature devoted to the early years of Congo independence, and little latitude exists for major new discoveries.

Nonetheless, Kent has consulted a wider range of official documents, now mostly in the public domain, than any previous scholar. He has thoroughly explored the U.S. National Archives, as well as the Dwight Eisenhower, John F. Kennedy, and Lyndon B. Johnson presidential libraries, in addition to the British National Archives at Kew. These materials enable him to go further than any previous account in the richness of detail. More important, he gives fuller coverage than any previous study to the debates and conflicts within the U.S. foreign policy establishment, as well as critical insights into their contradictions and occasional incoherence. These are valuable contributions and assure the volume a permanent place in the roster of works devoted to the diplomatic history of a crucial episode in African decolonization, when an inadequately prepared power transfer was instantly unhinged by an army mutiny, the panicked flight of many senior administrative officials, and the secession of the richest province, Katanga. Overnight the Congo became a global crisis and key Cold War battleground.

Within a fortnight, the newly independent Congo government had lost control of the instruments that defined its statehood: its security force, its top bureaucratic instrument, and its main revenue source. This produced a degree of international involvement unique in the annals of decolonization, a UN peacekeeping force and accompanying civil operation that served as a virtual trusteeship without the legal authority provided by full sovereignty, and an extraordinary level of external diplomatic action, especially U.S. and Belgian. With the controversial ouster of the first prime minister, Patrice Lumumba, in early September 1960, and the impossibility of securing parliamentary approval of a replacement, the Congo was in a constitutional vacuum until August 1961. The Katanga secession, a critical pivot to the crisis, was not reversed by UN military action until January 1963.

The Kent study well captures the distortions injected into U.S. policy by the Cold War template superposed on Congolese events. The Soviet Union undoubtedly applied its own ideological frame onto reading the dramatic uncertainties of the early weeks of Congo independence and perceived unanticipated opportunities to expand its influence and apply a counterimperial logic. We await access to Soviet archives of the period to have a fuller picture. Nonetheless, on the ground Moscow’s limited capacity to affect outcomes or find “reliable” Congolese allies soon became apparent to many. But the preoccupation with possible Soviet exploitation of the Congo crisis remained alive in the Washington official mind, fed by fears of the aggressive left nationalist discourse of the Lumumbist forces.

If one may judge from the references, the book is primarily based on the U.S. diplomatic archives. The bibliography includes most though not all the important works covering this period, but only a small handful of footnotes cite any sources other than the archives, and most of these are to the Kalb volume noted above. Some UN memoirs are cited (those by Rajeshewar Dayal, Conor Cruise O’Brien, Indar Jit Rikhye), but not documents.
The heavy reliance on U.S. archives, no matter how valuable, invites some reflection on their limits in providing a complete picture of Congo events. In addition to the Kinshasa embassy, consular posts existed only in Lubumbashi, Bukavu, and Kisangani. Diplomatic personnel at the time did not travel much into the vast interior. Some U.S. missionaries provided information, but otherwise diplomats’ grasp of what happened beyond the orbit of the diplomatic outposts depended on what their Congolese sources or Belgians resident in the hinterland might report.

The image of disorderly state management at the summit conveyed by the U.S. dispatches, while accurate enough, misses the restoration of a reasonably functioning administration by late 1961 and 1962 at ground level in much of the country, save in battleground areas of Katanga and some other parts of the east. Although Congolese lacked top cadres to staff the highest administrative ranks, the experienced senior clerks who took over at the local administrative posts often performed well. The solid infrastructure and social services of the Catholic mission network also insulated the countryside from higher-level disarray. The image of an impaired Congolese state arising from the Kent analysis fails to prepare one for the striking restoration of an effective state with wide popular support in the first years of the Mobutu regime, even if it became degraded by kleptocratic practice after its initial decade.

Less persuasive than the documentation of Cold War–derived policies is the thesis running through the book that the aim of U.S. global dominance and the nurturing of a world capitalist system were underlying policy drivers. In contrast to Belgium and to some extent Britain, U.S. capital involvement in Congo was small. Washington clearly wanted a “pro-Western” regime in Congo as elsewhere, or minimally one not linked to the Soviet Union, but I do not recollect any of those I interviewed at the time ever speaking about an engagement to defend “capitalism” at large.


Reviewed by Roger E. Kanet, University of Miami

One of the important ways that knowledge in the social sciences expands is by contemporary scholars reacting to and building on the work of their predecessors. It is most unfortunate that the editors and most of the authors of The End of the Cold War and the Third World have almost totally ignored the fact that generations of scholars, in both the former USSR and the West, examined in great detail the issue of Soviet involvement in the Third World. The readers of this volume will never know that Vernon Aspaturian, Robert Donaldson, Alvin Rubinstein, and Jerry Hough—four of the dozens of Western scholars who toiled in this field—ever existed or wrote on the topics under discussion here. Moreover, with the exception of a few of the chapters, almost all reference is missing to the analysts who were tracking the changes in Soviet
policy during the Gorbachev years that are the focus of the present volume. Did any of them get the story right? We do not learn the answer to this question because the question itself is never posed, and they and their scholarly work are not mentioned. It is almost as though relevant information and analysis pertaining to the impact on the developing countries of “new thinking” in Soviet foreign policy and of the end of the Cold War become available only after the opening of archives and the publication of memoirs.

To be fair to the authors and editors, what they have written is interesting, exceptionally well-documented, and, de facto, expands, but does not overturn, the assessments of earlier analysts—despite the overall failure to relate the current discussions to the work of those earlier analysts. What is most impressive across almost all the chapters is the wealth of documentary evidence on which the authors have been able to draw.

The volume begins with an introduction by the coeditors and a chapter on Mikhail Gorbachev and the Third World by Svetlana Savranskaya that only partly set the stage for the empirical chapters to follow. The memoir and documentary materials that Savranskaya cites add reality to her discussion of Soviet policy. However, a greater effort by the editors to examine both Soviet and Western analyses of changing Soviet policy in the 1980s and the presentation of a framework within which the following materials could be placed would have provided a stronger introduction to the rest of the book.

The one chapter that does not suffer from the failure to tie documentary material to earlier analyses of Soviet policy is that on Soviet arms transfers to developing countries by Mark Kramer. Kramer does an especially good job of relating the “new thinking” of Gorbachev to the broad changes in Soviet policy that followed from that thinking and provides the link that I find missing in other chapters.

The chapters on changes in Chinese policy (mainly before the 1980s), by Chien Jian, and the impact of the end of the Cold War on the Arab-Israeli conflict, by Dima Adamsky, are not well integrated into the overall structure of the book, although they provide interesting assessments and insights concerning these two sets of events. The remainder of the volume includes specific case studies that examine the relevance and impact of the end of the Cold War between the superpowers on the ongoing confrontations in Afghanistan (by Artemy Kalinovsky), on the winding down of conflict in Indochina (by Bálint Szlontai), on India’s foreign policy and its place in the world (by Sergey Radchenko), and on developments in Nicaragua and Chile (by Victor Figueroa Clark). All of these brief essays examine how the resolution of the global competition for domination between the Soviet Union and the United States played out in the policies of the countries examined. The authors draw on available documentary materials to tell individual stories quite convincingly. Unfortunately, however, little overlap exists among the issues raised and the questions posed and answered from chapter to chapter. As a result, the cases must stand on their own and do not together provide a more general examination of the impact of the end of the Cold War on regional conflicts.

Two interesting chapters, largely unrelated to the material that precedes them,
concern the Latin American debt crisis of the 1980s (by Duccio Basosi) and the way the end of the Cold War was viewed in Brazil (by Matias Spektor). These essays, too, provide interesting narratives and excellent documentation. However, they do not really contribute to the development of a coherent argument across the entire volume.

One of the most relevant discussions of the overall nature of Soviet foreign policy in the final years of the Cold War is the brief chapter by Vladimir Shubin titled “Were the Soviets ‘Selling Out’” in their relations with progressive forces in Southern Africa as they reduced their support and encouraged their clients to pursue negotiated settlements with their opponents rather than continue with endless armed struggle. These questions are ones that might serve as a foundation for the analysis of changing Soviet policy across the entire developing world in the late 1980s. Shubin’s response to his own question is a qualified “no,” and this undoubtedly would remain the answer to the question if posed across the range of regional conflicts in which the Soviet Union was involved over the prior several decades.

Two additional short essays on developments in Southern Africa complement that of Shubin. Chris Saunders examines the broad impact of the end of the Cold War on developments across southern Africa, and Sue Onslow, writing with Simon Bright, tracks the importance of the media (in the age before 24-hour-a-day television news) in covering the struggles in Angola and elsewhere in southern Africa. Again, these are interesting, but largely unrelated, narratives that do not generate an integrated volume.

It is at this point that The End of the Cold War and the Third World simply stops, with no effort whatsoever by the editors to pull together into a coherent whole the various themes developed in the many chapters. The result is not satisfying. Although the individual chapters will no doubt stand up as contributions to the literature because of their inherent logic and the fact that most of them emerge from a strong documentary base, the book as a whole lacks cohesion and an integrated message.


Reviewed by Lester W. Grau, Foreign Military Studies Office

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, the Russian press has produced a variety of books on the subject, and the current conflict in Afghanistan has created a Western demand for more information about the earlier Soviet war in Afghanistan.
Sir Rodric Braithwaite is known and respected as one of the grand old men of the expert community on the USSR/Russia. Following occupation duties as a soldier in postwar Vienna, Braithwaite studied Russian at Cambridge University 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. Braithwaite was thus in an optimal position to view and analyze these events. This is his third book on Russian affairs.

Artemy M. Kalinovsky is a much younger analyst who has already established a name for himself in the community. He earned his master's and doctoral degrees in international history from the London School of Economics and his undergraduate degree from George Washington University. He is on the faculty of the University of Amsterdam. This is his second book.

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 war itself, *Tragediya i doblest Afgana* (Moscow: DPI Iskona, 1995), based on his service with the Ministry of Defense operational group inside Afghanistan during the fighting. General Makhmut Gareev wrote the preeminent work on the Soviet withdrawal and aftermath based on his assignment as the senior Soviet adviser after the departure of the Soviet 40th Army, *Moya poslednyaya voina: Afganistan bez sovetskikh voisk* (Moscow: INSAN, 1996). Braithwaite and Kalinovsky have built on the two generals’ books, and both of them interviewed Lyakhovskii. Primary research in the documents of the war should be in Dari and Russian. In fact, most of the accessible material is in Russian, which has a certain bias and slant.

Braithwaite uses his Russian-language skills, his access to Russian archives, his diplomatic contacts, and his numerous Russian friends and contacts to draw the Russian 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 deals especially with political events (he is, after all, an ambassador) and individual vignettes. It 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 may sound like a chaotic approach, but it is not—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. Political 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 good order. Braithwaite weaves 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 and 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, focusing on decision-making within the Soviet Politburo. The book, despite its title, offers a political history of the entire war and its aftermath, drawing on existing scholarship as well as interviews, archival documents, and other materials that were unavailable short years ago. Kalinovsky has assembled these in a plausible account of the underlying Soviet politics and decisions that shaped the war and its termination. He discusses the input from the Soviet military and State Security (KGB) organs to the government and its impact on policymaking. The book does not provide a military history, but it does tie key military events to the decisions of the governments in Moscow and Kabul. The book’s strength is its use of a variety of Soviet and Russian sources that are not widely read in the West. Kalinovsky also throws a bit more light on the still murky politics of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan/Republic of Afghanistan.

A Long Goodbye focuses on high-level politics and foreign policy pertaining to the Soviet-Afghan War, giving primary emphasis to Mikhail Gorbachev and his attempts to guide the Soviet Politburo’s deliberations on this issue. 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 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 history is a great tool for historians of recent events, but it has the normal problems of bias, accuracy of memory, and changes in perception over time. Putting together an accurate picture from numerous, conflicting accounts is a formidable task. The interviewer goes through a long, often painful personal learning process before becoming thoroughly comfortable with interviewing equipment, scheduling, planning, time management, and cross-walking. 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, and they deserve special kudos for their success.

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

Both authors seem to get a bit off track when comparing the U.S. war in Vietnam with the Soviet-Afghan War. This is a popular exercise among journalists, but 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 countries possessing strategic nuclear weapons, the two wars 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 guerrillas, 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 guerrillas of 1812 with the Spanish guerrillas and Wellington’s Army of the Peninsular Campaign even though they have much more in common—the French army. History may not repeat itself, but it provides some great models. All models, of course, require modification to fit the country, history, customs, economy, and ideology of the model to the current event.

Kalinovsky takes his comparison one step further. 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. I am skeptical of this comparison, but I leave the final decision to the reader. History is history, analysis is analysis, but do the two cases offer enough symmetry of variables and time? Probably not.

Gorbachev was not in power when the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan collapsed in April 1992. Following the attempted coup in Moscow in August 1991, Gorbachev lost all leverage over Soviet policy in Afghanistan. It was Boris Yeltsin, the elected president of the Russian Federation, who pushed for the termination of all 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 former Central Intelligence Agency station chief in South Vietnam, wrote that U.S. policy in Vietnam was designed to gain “a decent interval” before the collapse of Saigon. Judged by that criterion, Gorbachev’s policy delivered an appropriate 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 Vladimir Gel’man, European University at St. Petersburg

This book represents an in-depth analysis of practices of school governance in the Kirov region (Vyatka) based on detailed, careful, and thorough archival research. The author, who previously wrote extensively on the history of Soviet schooling and published several books and journal articles based on general observations and case study research, offers an interpretive study of provincial educational bureaucracy during the period of high Stalinism, including the Great Terror. Holmes masterfully combines two rather different albeit not totally unrelated perspectives: on the one hand, he follows the path of “revisionist” scholars of Soviet history such as J. Arch Getty and Sheila Fitzpatrick; on the other hand, he relies heavily on the ever relevant descriptions
of Russian officialdom provided by the great Russian writer, Mikhail Saltykov–Shchedrin (who was in exile in Vyatka in the mid-nineteen century and based his immortal satirical sketches on first-hand observations of local bureaucrats). This constellation enables Holmes to focus on numerous episodes from the everyday experience of school directors, teachers, educational administrators, and their subordinates, highlighting instances of conflicts and complaints, friendships and hostilities, intrigues and compromises, abuses of power, sexual affairs, political imprisonments, and sundry other tragic and farcical events in this Soviet Russian province in the 1930s and early 1940s.

Holmes posits that his approach to the study of Soviet educational bureaucracy is similar to the understanding of the nature of performance in theater, thus justifying the book's title. He argues that many of the practices of school governance in Stalin's Russia were reminiscent of theatrical performances, with the authorities, parents, pupils, and the wider public as the actors. Although to some extent these developments echoed similar trends of high-profile politics in Moscow (in particular, they were symbolically represented during the infamous Moscow show trials), the specific identities and interests of provincial agents seriously altered or sometimes even perverted the original meanings of the scripts, which had been imposed on them by the Communist Party and the Soviet government. Drawing on Clifford Geertz's and James Scott's anthropological interpretations of governance practices, Holmes outlines and analyzes several forms of these performances, such as “the art of complaining” (when humiliated subordinates would appeal to the bosses of their bosses), “the escalation of negativity” (deliberately focusing on only the dark side of subordinates and arbitrarily blaming them for misconduct and wrongdoing), and “symbiosis of errors” (deliberately linking professional underperformance or personal misbehavior with political accusations, including stigmatization and severe punishment of “enemies of the people”). Moreover, given the turbulent political environment of the 1930s, former executioners soon turned into victims, and vice versa.

The “Grand Theater” of provincial (as well as Moscow) governance practices reached a peak during the Great Terror, and Holmes correctly points out that after 1938 the Soviet regime's shifting priorities limited the extent of arbitrary rule by local officials and gave greater room for maneuver to all provincial actors. School directors and teachers thus acquired a bit more freedom in their professional and personal lives and slightly greater protection against the top-down pressure of their bosses by relying on legal regulations and institutional mechanisms such as pedagogical councils. However, the rise of what Holmes calls “proprietary professionalism” aggravated the principal-agent problems in Soviet educational governance because of the lack of adequate institutions and appropriate incentives for schoolteachers and directors as well as for local bureaucrats. Based on this study, one might argue that in a broader perspective the softening of the “rules of the game” under the Stalinist system without reforming its substance contributed to the subsequent institutional decay of the entire Soviet provincial governance, a trend that became highly visible several decades later.

Nevertheless, the book, despite being well-written and easily readable, is marred by certain shortcomings and flaws. Its almost exclusive focus on provincial educational bureaucracy tells us little about school education as such. Despite spotty no-
tions of troubles with curricula, the extent to which the “Grand Theater” of governance in the 1930s affected the contents and results of school education in the Kirov region and elsewhere in the Soviet Union remains unclear. Second and probably more important, Holmes does not discuss whether the educational governance practices in Stalin's Russia were specific and context dependent (or were similar to other policy areas) or, conversely, whether they represented typical instances of how the Soviet Union was governed in the 1930s and early 1940s. The microanalysis presented in the book does not lead Holmes to macro-conclusions about the nature of Soviet governance in general and its educational system in particular.

Of course, one should not blame Holmes, who consciously opts for the narrow focus of his research and strictly follows the documentary evidence without pretending to draw a broader picture. But readers might learn from this study much more than just facts and figures from life stories of ordinary school officials and find a useful way of placing provincial observations into a more coherent and comprehensive framework for understanding Soviet governance largely along the lines of Saltykov-Shchedrin’s satirical sketches of Vyatka a century-and-a-half ago.


Reviewed by Matthew Lenoe, University of Rochester (NY)

Jan Plamper’s The Stalin Cult is a thorough, well-researched monograph about the cult’s production, from Iosif Stalin’s official 50th birthday celebration in December 1929 through his death in 1953. Plamper focuses on the creation and dissemination of visual materials, including representations of the dictator in Pravda, socialist realist painting, and film. Although some of Plamper’s attempts to “add value” to the book, most prominently his claim to be elucidating the cult’s “alchemy of power,” do not succeed, The Stalin Cult is well worth reading for any student of Stalinism or of modern personality cults throughout the world.

Chapter 1, “Paths to the Stalin Cult,” traces the development of modern personality cults from Napoleon III through the interwar period, as well as the tendency of the prerevolutionary radical Russian intelligentsia to organize around charismatic leaders. In the chapter’s conclusion, Plamper briefly outlines the emergence of a cult of Vladimir Lenin following the Bolshevik leader’s death. The material in this chapter is fascinating, but Plamper does not connect the development of the Lenin and Stalin cults directly to the international context he limns earlier. He does not discuss Bolshevik leaders’ knowledge or views of personality cults in other societies, nor does he ask whether the Lenin cult emerged out of a series of ad hoc decisions or a deliberate process of construction by party leaders. This last point seems especially important to explore, given Plamper’s claim that the Stalin cult was deliberately constructed, above all by the dictator himself.
In chapter 2, Plamper tracks representations of Stalin in Pravda from 1929 through 1953, noting changes over time in the frequency and types of images. One of the book’s most intriguing observations is the increasing use of Stalin’s absence to represent his “presence,” as in a socialist realist painting of Soviet citizens crowding round a radio to hear the dictator speak. Regrettably, in this case as in others, Plamper does not offer an explanation of this shift, beyond a one-sentence suggestion that it was intended to prepare the population for the ruler’s death. However, Plamper’s discussion of the compositional structure and symbolism of socialist realist paintings (in chapter 3, “Stalin’s Image in Space”) includes both description and incisive analysis.

The second part of The Stalin Cult (chapters 4–6) is devoted to the production of Stalin images, chiefly in socialist realist painting. Early on, Plamper uses scattered archival evidence to argue that Stalin closely managed his own cult. This evidence is intriguing but is insufficient to make a definitive case, and Plamper does not consider the possibility that artists and officials were “working toward the vozhd (chief),” making educated guesses in response to indirect central signals regarding the kinds of images that would please Stalin. Plamper’s hypothesis that Stalin deliberately left an archival paper trail showing his “modesty” is unsupported. On the other hand, Plamper makes the excellent general point that Soviet leaders, in contrast to the Nazis and Fascists, had to present the Stalin cult as unwanted by the “chief” because of the collectivism inherent in Marxist ideology.

Much of the second half of The Stalin Cult is a thick description of the production of socialist realist paintings of Stalin. Plamper details Kliment Voroshilov’s role as the figure in the party leadership who was the chief patron of painters. Plamper surveys the practices of subpatronage, the rhetoric of letters between patrons and clients, and the construction of special communities for artists, in particular the artists’ housing complex on Upper Maslovka Street in Moscow. He concludes his examination of patronage with a flourish regarding the “mutually reinforcing nexus between personality cult and patronage” that, he claims, came out of the “demiurgic realization” of the socialist project (p. 164). Yet Plamper has not actually made a case for this in his thick description—it remains a flourish and no more.

Plamper’s examination of the actual production of socialist realist paintings is fascinating, covering the almost endless process of vetting the artworks, the categories used to judge them, the planning of production, and the reproduction of paintings by lower-status artists and in print media. The vetting of paintings was not confined to straightforward censorship from above. Party officials, art critics, museum curators, and high-ranking painters all participated in meetings in which paintings were subjected to criticism. Stalin portraits were supposed to combine in Hegelian fashion “naturalism” and representation of the leader’s essential qualities such as his vision of the future and his role as “teacher and friend” of the Soviet peoples.

The final chapter of The Stalin Cult is titled “The Audience as Cult Producer,” but it would be better named “The Audience as Cult Product.” That at least is the core of Plamper’s argument here. Focusing on the books in which visitors to artistic exhibitions wrote comments, he contends (in my view correctly) that these sources cannot be read as evidence of actual audience response; instead, they are reflections of
a complex process by which the regime sought to create, control, and channel “proper” audience understanding of paintings. Although Plamper demonstrates that artists, critics, and propaganda officials deployed carefully selected individual comments from these books to buttress their position concerning the desirable properties of socialist realist art, he does not demonstrate the widespread impact of audience views on cult production. Hence the problem with the chapter title. The chapter is also marred by a gratuitous and now well-worn attack on scholars who made early use of police and party reports on the popular “mood” to try to gauge the populace’s attitudes toward the regime. Plamper and others have claimed that such scholars lacked sophistication in source criticism and used the reports naïvely as a reflection of public opinion. Such claims are belied by reading these works, such as Sarah Davies’s *Public Opinion in Stalin’s Russia: Terror, Propaganda, and Dissent* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), which uses source triangulation to make limited assertions about the types of popular attitudes that existed.

*The Stalin Cult* is subtitled “A Study in the Alchemy of Power.” Plamper does not discuss the “alchemy of power” theme in the main part of the book, turning to it only in the conclusion. He writes that the alchemy of power is “unknowable,” a mysterious, implicitly magical process that generates a “surplus (of power) that remains beyond books” (p. 226). Plamper thus negates the process that he has declared central to his book. By his own account, he has written a monograph about a topic “beyond books.” The phrase “alchemy of power,” like Plamper’s phrase about the “demiurgic realization” of the “socialist project,” remains an empty flourish. This is unfortunate, because, stripped of ornamentation, *The Stalin Cult* is a solid, empirically based study of the production of a personality cult, and an important contribution to the literature on Stalinism.


Reviewed by Michael David-Fox, Georgetown University

In this fine monograph Anne E. Gorsuch sheds much light on the Thaw-era opening of the USSR to the outside world, a topic that has major implications for understanding the era of Nikita Khrushchev and the cultural Cold War. The title of the book derives from a quotation from Vasilii Aksenov’s *Zvezdnyi bilet* (Ticket to the Stars), the 1961 novel so emblematic of the exuberant strivings of the Thaw’s younger generation: “Dive into the depths of the sea, climb mountains, fear nothing, all this is your world” (p. 1). In 1955, the year the Soviet Communist Party adopted a resolution permitting foreign tourism for Soviet citizens after the severe restrictions of the Stalin era, only around 2,000 Soviets tourists left the country, Gorsuch estimates. This figure increased dramatically in the years ahead, with half a million tourists traveling in the decade from 1955 to 1964 (p. 18). The number reached 2 million by 1974 and...
4.5 million by 1985 (p. 186). Although travel to the West remained mostly a privilege for elites, Soviet tourism to Eastern Europe became a mass phenomenon, extending into the middle ranks of Soviet society. Given the importance of this issue, it is surprising that no significant Russian or Western study has analyzed Soviet foreign tourism in the post-Stalin period. Gorsuch’s book ably fills this gap.

Although *All This is Your World* begins with an overview of Soviet domestic tourism and foreign travel from the vantage point of the late Stalin period, Gorsuch’s extensive archival research gathers pace with an illuminating chapter on the place of postwar Estonia and Tallin, which to Soviet eyes were distinctly European, as “our abroad” (*nasha zagranitsa*). This is followed by strong chapters on travel to the “fraternal” socialist countries of Eastern Europe and elite travel to the West. The book is rounded out by two imaginative chapters: “Fighting the Cold War on the French Riviera,” an analysis of the Soviet experience of discovering Western society and material culture via memoirs and interviews; and “Film Tourism: From Iron Curtain to Silver Screen,” a discussion of the more controlled and prescriptive depiction of travel and the outside world in Soviet cinema. As this structure suggests, the book is oriented mainly toward speaking about the Soviet-European relationship and what travel says about the Thaw-era apprehension of the West—ideologically, culturally, and economically. Gorsuch captures the ambivalence of the period, with the newly confident, reforming Soviet superpower still ready to stamp out bourgeois contagion. But Gorsuch chooses not to give the Soviet relationship with the West the broadest play in her overall conclusions and contextualizations (as opposed to treatment in the individual chapters). She aims to fit the Soviet case into the wider scholarship on tourism, necessitating a tight focus on tourism per se.

Occasionally, one finds a bit of a disjuncture between the abstruse and sometimes universalizing theoretical literature on travel (souvenirs, according to Susan Stewart, are desired for events “whose materiality has escaped us, events that thereby exist only through the invention of narrative”) and the nitty-gritty of archival research (a Soviet tourist, far from losing track of materiality, agonizes over the choice of spending hard currency on a souvenir or a café). For the most part, however, these two aspects fit together harmoniously, with Gorsuch’s immersion in cultural and transnational history enabling her to produce a subtle analysis based on a fine research effort in Russian repositories relating to tourism, travel, and youth tourism. The book is made even more illuminating through research in U.S. and Hungarian archives and, in particular, Estonian and British collections that give a sense of local perspectives and interactions with the incoming tourists.

Several master themes are adroitly handled in the book, adding to our understanding of the period. The first has to do with the dualistic Soviet view of foreign travel in this period, at once valuable and enviable yet potentially dangerous and degenerate. Estonia, for example, could be depicted as both “un-Soviet” and “über-Soviet” (p. 69). Travel to the West, involving extensive vetting and political preparation, was seen as an edifying immersion in European culture, and thus a part of becoming “cultured.” Ultimately, such tourism could even be seen as part of an imagined Soviet trajectory toward a civilized modernity. At the same time, too much
enthusiasm for the non-Soviet world was a cardinal sin at a time when the Soviet authorities, secret police minders, and prim or bullying group leaders perceived ideological pitfalls and temptations around every corner. When discussing travel to the West, Gorsuch emphasizes the scripted performances Soviet citizens were expected to play as part of the Cold War competition. When analyzing travel to Eastern Europe, she addresses the tension between the strong sense of Soviet political superiority over the younger socialist “brothers” and the equally strong sense that Eastern Europe was not behind, but ahead of, the Soviet Union in many ways. Soviet authorities became fearful that many East Europeans would come to regard Soviet citizens, especially non-elites, as inferior and culturally backward. In a high-level 1962 report the vice chairman of Intourist, Erokhin, wrote with humor and some embarrassment about the knitted underwear one group of Soviet tourists wore to the beach: “It had once been black, but had faded to grey; one end hung below the knees, and the other rode up God knows where” (p. 102).

Gorsuch’s multifaceted treatment of consumption and material culture is one of the highlights of the book. Travel abroad was itself an important object to be attained, and not infrequently profited from economically, but we also learn also about how images and experiences were consumed. For some, travel abroad was a revelatory shock that permanently altered their Soviet worldviews. For most other travelers in this period, Gorsuch concludes, “enjoying the West did not necessitate a rejection of the Soviet self” (p. 166). Unofficial doubts and criticisms, moreover, for the majority of travelers did not necessarily mean resistance or even uncertainty. The Khrushchev period, seen through the lens of tourism, thus comes across as deeply ambivalent about the West yet confident enough to attempt to domesticate “acceptable differences” with other countries even as Soviet propaganda still demonized “dangerous ones” (p. 184), as Gorsuch argues in her chapter about film. This “uneasy combination,” she maintains, was characteristic of the period.

If I might be allowed one quibble with Gorsuch’s fine book, I would qualify the way she positions the Thaw experience in the broader arc of Soviet history. In several relevant passages, she places too much emphasis on “proletarian tourism,” which peaked during the First Five-Year Plan, and does not sufficiently distinguish between pre-1937 and late Stalinism. The impact of the war, in which millions of Soviet soldiers saw Europe, needs more consideration, too. Finally, if one talks not about mass tourism per se but about travel more generally, the 1920s has more in common with the 1950s than Gorsuch would allow. For example, the combination of selective apprehension of Western modernity and fear of dangerous bourgeois contamination was very much in place. But references to earlier periods are not in fact central to Gorsuch’s contribution. Her significant study will allow scholars to analyze the specificities of the Thaw more confidently.

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Reviewed by Amy E. Randall, Santa Clara University

The following joke was popularized during the era of Nikita Khrushchev: “The inspection committee is checking out a newly finished apartment building. To test the sound-proofing, a committee member walks into the next apartment and yells to his partner, ‘Kolya, can you hear me?’ In response, his partner says: ‘You fool, I can see you.’” (Taken from Bruce Grant, *Tiny Revolutions in Russia: Twentieth Century Soviet and Russian History in Anecdotes* New York: Routledge, 2005, p. 75.) The prefabricated and standardized five-story walk-ups that spread throughout the urban landscape under Khrushchev’s leadership, nicknamed the khrushchevki, were often the butt of jokes. As disillusionment with this new form of housing set in, the khrushchevki were often referred to as krushcheby, a play on words that essentially means “Khrushchev slums.” Lacking amenities such as elevators, and sometimes suffering from major structural defects, these small and poorly designed apartments came to be widely ridiculed and despised. According to Mark Smith, however, Khrushchev’s mass housing program was no joke: it marked a fundamental shift in Soviet policy from “sacrifice to beneficence.” If in earlier years housing was sacrificed on behalf of other socialist goals, under Khrushchev its mass development became a top priority. Despite the legitimate criticism at the root of many khrushchevki jokes, tens of millions of Soviet people benefited from the creation of these structures as they moved from frequently oppressive and poor-quality communal housing and “basements, barracks, wretched shacks, and worse” into homes of their own (p. 123).

Smith’s well-researched book examines urban housing policy during the late Stalin and Khrushchev years. Under Khrushchev’s rule, the government promoted many new housing initiatives, and residential construction proliferated. As a result, housing reform is typically associated with the Khrushchev era. Although Smith grants Khrushchev a crucial role in the development of a mass housing program, he explains that a new Soviet approach to housing began much earlier. Smith’s work thus contributes to a growing body of scholarship that jettisons the conventional historiographical divide between Stalinism and post-Stalinism.

Chapters 1 and 2 examine the early stages of housing reform. Smith convincingly argues that World War II served as the catalyst for change. The wartime destruction of an already insufficient housing stock made postwar reconstruction unavoidable, and thus the Soviet government turned to the residential needs of urban populations. Smith argues that this constituted an initial step toward a new ethos of “beneficence” in housing policy. As officials promoted concrete measures to improve residential living standards, people’s basic housing needs began to be addressed.

In grappling with the postwar housing crisis, Soviet officials initially adopted largely piecemeal solutions and limited reforms. But as central government agencies and local bodies sought to increase housing output efficiently and quickly, architec-
tural planning began to shift. Although postwar construction and reconstruction still involved grandiose Stalinist designs, by the early 1950s more and more projects relied on standardization and prefabrication, a design strategy that Khrushchev promoted en masse. During the late Stalinist era, officials additionally advanced rationalizing measures in the housing economy, such as organizational reforms between the center and localities and better training and wages for construction workers. Although such measures were sporadic and uncoordinated, Smith argues that they laid the groundwork for the mass housing program that unfolded under Khrushchev.

Smith explains that from 1954 to 1957, Khrushchev’s incipient mass housing program was guided by the “ethic of beneficence”—a commitment to developing housing for the benefit of the Soviet people—which was to be achieved by quantitative expansion and “rationality in approach.” Although central planning, patronage, and the release of hundreds of thousands of Gulag prisoners challenged efforts to increase output and rationalize the housing system, considerable progress was made. In 1957, Khrushchev formalized his all-union housing policy in a decree that called for the elimination of the housing shortage within twelve years by providing single-family apartments for all families. In Smith’s view, “housing policy as beneficence thus reached its clearest peak” (p. 75). At the same time, the decree promoted a shift in policy.

After the 1957 decree, Smith contends, the “ethic of beneficence” that had guided Khrushchev’s early housing policy was replaced by the “aspiration to paradise,” that is, the drive to reach the Communist future by supplying all families with individual homes. Chapter 3 explores this phase of Soviet housing policy. As planners, builders, and others pursued Khrushchev’s directive, they gave overriding priority to physical housing output measured in square meters. Housing quality and broader municipal construction (e.g., the development of sewage facilities) were sacrificed for housing quantity. During this time housing policy also became more explicitly ideological. According to Smith, the epitome of this was the development of a new urban phenomenon, the microdistrict, which was organized to provide thousands of residents with communal living structures and opportunities as well as separate homes in standardized apartment blocks. Officials envisioned microdistricts as a vehicle for inculcating Communist values. Ideally the microdistricts would transform residents’ consciousness by mobilizing them as volunteers in collective initiatives—social commissions and house committees—and by providing them with communal, cultural, and educational services, such as Red corners.

One of the book’s most interesting findings is that the individual building of homes remained an important part of the overall housing economy throughout the 1950s, even as the government adopted a more coordinated and official mass housing program. This activity was permitted, Smith explains, largely for pragmatic reasons: the state needed all the assistance it could get with residential construction and reconstruction. But this activity was also allowed because the dwellings that were built were considered “personal property,” which Communist leaders distinguished from private property. Unlike private property, personal property was for “personal use” only and, if sold, was not allowed to turn a profit (p. 143). In the 1950s, Soviet housing policy
explicitly fostered the expansion of “personal property” and “socialist property” (property of local councils, factories and enterprises, state agencies, and cooperatives). In the early 1960s, however, as the housing program became more oriented toward a “communist future,” “personal property” came under attack. The government passed legislative measures that hindered the individual construction of homes. Run-down shacks as well as more modern individual houses were razed for urban renewal and increased state construction. Such demolition, Smith argues, was not merely pragmatic; it was “based on a reckless celebration of ideology” (p. 89). “Personal property,” though never outlawed, did not fit as comfortably as “socialist property” with Khrushchev’s push to the Communist future.

The book’s final two chapters examine the implications of this new stage of Khrushchev’s housing policy for “ownership.” Smith argues that as “personal property” in urban areas was increasingly supplanted by state housing, the practice of “individual ownership” by tenants cohered and expanded. Under Khrushchev’s leadership and the development of a more bureaucratized and systematized government-directed housing economy, citizens gained the “right” to housing and, as tenants, enjoyed certain “rights” of ownership, “security of occupancy [of a separate family apartment], the relative inviolability of private space, and the practice of inheritance” (p. 168). Smith acknowledges that these housing rights were limited (e.g., a propiska system prohibited citizens from moving wherever they wanted), but he still sees them as significant. Such “rights” helped to consolidate “individual ownership” of state apartments and led to vast improvements in the standard of living for many individuals. Despite persistent corruption, these “rights” also contributed to less inequality and greater legality in the housing economy. Moreover, whereas in capitalist countries property rights and social welfare were antithetical, in the Soviet Union property rights and social welfare became intertwined. This nexus of property and welfare, Smith claims, provided important glue for the Soviet system.

Smith’s book offers a broad overview of urban housing during the late Stalin and Khrushchev years. The breadth of the study allows for important observations about the continuities and shifts in Soviet housing and social welfare policies. As is often the case, however, the book’s broad coverage detracts from a more detailed examination of some potentially fascinating issues. This reader, for example, would have liked to hear more about the government’s adoption of standardized architecture, prefabricated housing, and microdistricts, all of which helped to produce urban uniformity, or what Smith refers to as a “paradise in grey.” Smith sees these housing strategies as both pragmatic and ideological, a means for facilitating easier and cheaper construction as well as a way to move closer to a Communist future by promoting housing benefits for all, symbolic de-Stalinization, and new “communist” ways of thinking. These are excellent points. But it would have been interesting to learn more about how these housing strategies were ideological. Did planners see the development of uniform mass housing and new urban landscapes as a way to overcome regional and national “backwardness”? Were microdistricts envisioned as vehicles in particular for transforming women, national minorities, and newly urbanized peasants? How did ideas about gender and the Soviet family shape standardized apartment designs and the provisioning
of separate family apartments? More active engagement with these questions and with recent scholarship that has begun to explore some of them would have enriched this study.

Using a wide array of archival sources as well as literature, film, and other primary materials, Property of Communists offers an important window on Soviet housing, social welfare, and property rights. The book is highly recommended for specialists as well as graduate students interested in these topics.

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Reviewed by László Borhi, Institute of History, Hungarian Academy of Sciences, and Indiana University

When Ronald Reagan introduced Mikhail Gorbachev and Edward Teller at a reception, Gorbachev allegedly refused to shake Teller’s outstretched hand and claimed not to know who Teller was: “there are many Tellers.” Teller replied, “I agree.” As author István Hargittai reveals, Teller was hounded by the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation because he had the same name as a Communist teacher in New York. Read as a remarkably candid self-reflection, Teller’s response to Gorbachev exposes the physicist’s awareness of the many facets of his own personality. Hargittai’s biography reveals the hidden dimensions of one of the most influential scientists of the twentieth century, showing him to be a product of extraordinary times.

Drawing on interviews, documents, and secondary sources, Hargittai traces Teller’s life from childhood through his emigration from Hungary to Germany and eventually the United States, his quest for the hydrogen bomb, his clash with J. Robert Oppenheimer, his stint as director of the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, his opposition to the nuclear test ban treaty, and his lobbying for the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI)—all while trying to penetrate Teller’s innermost thoughts. Breaking with the prevailing canon, Hargittai convincingly argues that “Teller made an invaluable contribution to world peace with his work on the hydrogen bomb.”

From childhood Teller was prepared for the formative experience of his life: exile. His first, “internal emigration” was the experience of Jewish families preparing their children for new environments. At an early age he developed doubts about even those close to him. He may never have been aware of his father’s devotion to him. His upper middle-class, assimilated Jewish family was caught in the turmoil of history when they left Hungary in 1926, finding refuge in Germany. Although legislation was adopted in Hungary in 1921 to curb Jewish participation in higher education, it did not prevent the young Edward from being admitted to the technical university. Yet, like many other intellectuals he decided to move to Germany, where he focused initially on chemical engineering.

Hargittai points out that Teller made some of his lasting contributions to science
in chemistry. He blames Teller’s decision to go to Germany in 1926 on the hostile environment in Hungary: “Teller left an anti-Semitic and fascist Hungary.” This explanation is unconvincing. Political and economic consolidation in Hungary helped anti-Semitism to subside, and it did not surge again until after the Great Depression. Although Miklós Horthy’s system in the mid- to late 1920s was authoritarian, it was a far cry from fascism. Moreover Teller, who felt a strong attachment to Hungary throughout his life, seems not to have personally experienced such prejudice. The members of his family who survived the Holocaust were deported to the countryside by the Communist authorities, who tried to recruit his sister in the hope of luring Teller into the Hungarian (and, by extension, Soviet) intelligence service.

In Germany, Teller developed unreserved—and, as Hargittai shows, unreciprocated—admiration for his professor, Werner Heisenberg. Teller maintained that Heisenberg sabotaged Adolf Hitler’s effort to build a nuclear bomb. Hargittai argues that Heisenberg and his colleagues worked to build nuclear weapons despite the Nazi leaders’ lack of interest and that new evidence about Heisenberg’s failed quest “renders Teller’s claim meaningless.” It might have been interesting to uncover the psychological roots of Teller’s unreserved devotion to Heisenberg. Teller was oblivious to the rise of anti-Semitism in Germany. Neither did he hold against Heisenberg his continued service to Hitler’s regime, although his collaboration was, as Hargittai shows, less blatant than that of other prominent scientists, some of whom were successful after the war despite their checkered past. Heisenberg was the one who introduced Teller to the international physics community, and Teller’s social and intellectual debt to Germany was great.

Hargittai finds it hard to explain Teller’s strong anti-Communism. He asserts that the physicist considered Communism to be a bigger menace than National Socialism. After a careful study of Teller’s statements about the causes of his anti-Communism, Hargittai finds that they are inconclusive, and he avers that Teller harbored anti-Soviet sentiments rather than hostility to Communism. In some writings Teller claimed he became anti-Communist when he learned of the imprisonment of Lev Landau in Moscow. Elsewhere Teller ascribed his anti-Communism to his reading of Arthur Koestler’s *Darkness at Noon*. All the sources on Teller’s anti-Communism are recollections and therefore unsuitable for tracing the evolution of his sentiments. Hargittai gets around this problem by arguing the implausibility of someone disliking the idea of Communism to this extent. Hargittai insists that Teller’s distaste was “directed primarily against the Soviet Union . . . and was less concerned with communist ideology. Soviet communism may have been more an expression of Russian ambitions than of the original communist ideology.” But this statement fails to explain why Communism has invariably given rise to tyranny and impoverished the societies in which it holds sway. Some Western intellectuals, including Oppenheimer, have been willing to turn a blind eye to the atrocious crimes of the Communist system and to disregard the fact that Marxism and its variants were ideologies of hatred, but Teller was not.

Hargittai points out that although others also testified against Oppenheimer, Teller was singled out among his peers for vilification. He attributes this to the
“shrewd” and seemingly “premeditated” nature of Teller’s statement. An alternate explanation worth exploring is whether Teller’s well-known political views played a role in the unforgiving hostility his mostly leftist peers displayed toward him. Teller claimed that he felt like “Daniel in the lion’s den.” A colleague, John Wheeler, said he appreciated Teller’s “honesty and courage.” A Soviet scientist, Vitalii Ginzburg, likewise voiced support for Teller: “I don’t think Teller was incorrect. Oppenheimer did not understand the Soviet threat and Teller did.” Hargittai argues that the Oppenheimer-Teller controversy was at least partly motivated by an interservice conflict. The physicist Freeman Dyson felt that Teller was entrapped in politics and that the U.S. Army and Air Force were “more hostile to each other than either of them toward the Russians.”

Hargittai stresses Teller’s crucial dual role—as political crusader and pioneering scientist—in the development of thermonuclear weapons. He argues that “the Ulam-Teller controversy has spoiled all attempts to unambiguously assess the events around the development of the American H bomb” and that Teller’s own writings “illustrate the difficulties of conveying and knowing the past.” Ironically, Teller believed that “the past can be known.” Do these contradictions expose Teller as less than truthful, a falsifier of history? Or is memory in general problematic? The controversy highlighted in the biography is a beautiful illustration of the notion that memory cannot be used reliably to reconstruct history. Hargittai contends, however, that despite recent attempts to downplay Teller’s contribution, it was actually crucial. Despite poring over all accessible sources, Hargittai could not fully clarify the record. The “absolute truth” of history cannot be revealed.

Teller’s personality was exceptionally strong, driven by insatiable curiosity for modern physics. He grilled Livermore physicists—an establishment he considered the main achievement of his life—over lunch about their research and would “display childish joy when he could figure out an explanation.” His partners remembered his tremendous mental capacity and recall. He exposed the darker side of his character when his conversation partner was ill prepared: “You’re wasting my time, go away.” His opposition to the nuclear test ban treaty and his advocacy of the SDI were vehement but not motivated by base desire. Teller, as Hargittai shows, never advocated aggressive behavior. His concern was to avoid nuclear war and stop the Soviet Union but not to kill its people. Some thought it would have been easy to imagine Teller in the Soviet program, “respected by many feared by more.” One acquaintance from Hungary remembered that he “suffers from a disease: he thinks he is Messiah.” He was arrogant and intolerant but could be charming and kind. Yet, his confidential correspondence reveals that privately he craved the approval of his superiors and was full of self-doubt. Although he testified against Oppenheimer, he stood against McCarthy in support of Stephen Brunauer. His strong willpower, stamina, and determination were “his baggage from Hungary: he could survive only if he outdid everybody around him.” He was “proud to be identified with the Jewish community,” and he sang the Hungarian National Anthem in his chosen home, Los Alamos. In sum, Teller is a fascinating subject for students of identity. In Hargittai’s informed estimation, Teller was a “first-rate” scientist who made “important, non-controversial discoveries.” The “ap-
lication of some of his results [is] still on the rise,” even though he was not on a par with the great geniuses of his time. Teller is also remembered as a great educator who reveled in the popularization of science.

Hargittai’s magnum opus is more than a biography or a history of science or thermonuclear weapons. The book is a fascinating history of an individual caught in the upheavals of the twentieth century.

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Reviewed by Sergey Radchenko, University of Nottingham Ningbo, China

I first heard of Pavel Stroilov in an article published by Claire Berlinski in the spring 2010 issue of The City Journal titled “A Hidden History of Evil: Why Doesn’t Anyone Care about the Unread Soviet Archives?” The article describes Stroilov’s claim that he had exploited a computer flaw and stolen thousands of pages of documents from the archive of the Gorbachev Foundation. These documents, the article claims, portrayed Mikhail Gorbachev as an evil and menacing manipulator and shed light on unsavory aspects of the end of the Cold War that allegedly would be highly embarrassing for many a retired statesman. Berlinski, who seemed unaware of the vast amount of scholarship that has been published based on research in the Russian archives, also maintained that Stroilov had approached Yale University Press to publish a book about the First Gulf War but that something supposedly “frightened” then-editor Jonathan Brent so that Stroilov “never heard from Brent again.”

Stroilov later shared his manuscript with me. I could immediately see why Yale University Press would not want to publish it, though I kept my reservations to myself out of politeness. Subsequently, Stroilov’s book came out with Price World Publishing, a low-budget press that specializes in weight-training and fitness books published under titles like 6 Weeks to 6-Pack Abs, Gluteus to the Maximus, and Muscle Explosion. This is Price World’s first foray into history. My impression after reading the final product is that the publisher would have done well to stick with its usual fare. Stroilov’s book, despite its outstanding documentary base (of which I will say more below), is a disaster.

Stroilov believes he has uncovered an international conspiracy—chiefly directed by Gorbachev, but with the assistance of U.S. President George H. W. Bush—aimed at returning Israel to its 1947 borders as a quid pro quo for Iraq’s withdrawal from Kuwait. Gorbachev’s anti-Jewish “socialist jihad” was part and parcel of his mission of “conquering the world” by using the “Red Arabs” of the Middle East, especially the Iraqis, Syrians, Libyans, and Egyptians, as his proxies. Bush (who, Stroilov suggests at one point, was Gorbachev’s “agent”) was duped into playing along because he was so heavily invested in building a “new world order” (p. 167). To this end, Bush bartered

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away “common sense, decency, and national interest,” falling into Gorbachev’s hide-

ous trap and incurring “debts,” which the United States subsequently tried to repay

by bolstering the remaining “Red Arabs” at the expense of Muslim democrats, Egyp-

tian Christians, and, needless to say, the Israelis, whom Washington repeatedly “be-

trayed” (e.g., pp. 223, 323, 345). A Masonic conspiracy (p. 60) also factors into the

story.

Devoid of any scholarly analysis, the book is full of nonsense, some of it derived

from far-fetched interpretations of Stroilov’s source material and some borrowed from

popular conspiracy theories. Fortunately, Stroilov is relatively brief with his own com-

ments. Most of the book is made up of verbatim transcripts of documents, including

memoranda of Gorbachev’s conversations with foreign leaders, Politburo transcripts,

and various enlightening notes penned by Gorbachev’s chief foreign policy aide,

Anatolii Chernyaev, and by other officials. Although excerpted and often cited out of

context, these documents offer an interesting glimpse into the dynamic of Gorba-

chev’s policymaking and disclose hitherto unknown aspects of Soviet diplomacy dur-

ing the first Gulf War.

Perhaps the most interesting documents are those that show Gorbachev’s eleventh-hour efforts to broker Iraq’s withdrawal from Kuwait, especially his memo-

randa of conversations with Iraqi Foreign Minister Tariq Aziz in September 1990 and

February 1991. Gorbachev comes across as deeply hostile to the expanding U.S. pres-

ence in the Gulf, as he pleads with Aziz not to give the Americans a pretext for launch-

ing a ground offensive: “If . . . the Americans get very deeply involved in the military

action, including on the ground, it will not be so easy to take a course in the interests

of Arabs and the world community” (p. 285). The documents suggest that Gorbachev

was genuinely concerned that Saddam Hussein’s defiance would end in Iraq’s com-

plete collapse and the resultant expansion of U.S. influence in the Middle East.

Gorbachev’s well-known mediation in the conflict therefore aimed not so much at

achieving a peaceful solution as at maintaining Soviet regional influence.

In general, Stroilov’s documents show Gorbachev to be a strategic thinker, con-

cerned with the preservation of Soviet interests in the Middle East and consistently

suspicious of U.S. policy in the region. Thus, we see Gorbachev argue at a Soviet Po-

litburo meeting on 12 February 1987 regarding South Yemen: “We have little interest

in that country itself. But the most important thing for us is the place where it is situa-

ted” (p. 93; emphasis in original). We also see Gorbachev working hard to expand

Soviet influence in the region by selling weapons to the Egyptians, the Iranians, and

the Yemenis who would “otherwise . . . take them from the USA” (p. 94). Predictably,

most of Gorbachev’s anti-American rhetoric dates from the early years of his rule,

something that Stroilov fails to note. Nonetheless, some of the documentary evidence

presented here tallies with the excellent studies by historians like Artemy Kalinovsky

and Svetlana Savranskaya. The evidence suggests there was more to Gorbachev than

his myth would allow, with considerable continuity between pre-1985 and post-1985

Soviet policies toward the Middle East and other parts of the world.

How new and how reliable are Stroilov’s documents? As for the novelty, most of

the “top-secret” documents cited in the book have long been available to historians.
This includes, in particular, Chernyaev’s diary, an immensely valuable resource. Whatever one can say about the other documents cited here, it was completely unethical for Stroilov to steal a person’s private diary. Fortunately Chernyaev over the past twelve years has published almost all of his diary in Russia, and the National Security Archive has posted translations of the sections pertaining to 1985–1991. The Gorbachev Foundation also has published many of the Soviet Politburo records and some of the memoranda of conversations cited by Stroilov. Other records are freely available at the Foundation’s archive in Moscow to anyone interested. Nevertheless, some of the presented material is clearly new and has not been published before. Although it is impossible to say with complete certainty until Stroilov releases the original documents, they also appear authentic.

A comparison between Stroilov’s documents and those that have been released by the Gorbachev Foundation in published volumes reveals a disturbing tendency by the Foundation to omit inconvenient evidence. This can be said, for example, of the aforementioned reference to South Yemen, which is absent from the published transcript of that Politburo meeting. There are dozens of similar examples. Thus, even though Stroilov’s book is analytically worthless, it is helpful to scholars in pointing to instances of falsification of the historical record. The Gorbachev Foundation has clearly tried to put the best “spin” on Gorbachev, but it has done so in ways that undermine its own credibility. The most important lesson of this book, therefore, is that unless Gorbachev prefers to have his legacy interpreted by Masonic conspiracy theorists on the basis of stolen documents, he should embrace Chernyaev’s proposal to release the full treasure-trove of documents still tightly held by the Foundation.