Immediately after Stalin’s death, his successors implemented major, albeit limited, reforms. These included reducing the use of forced labor, revision of the criminal code, mass amnesties for prisoners, and public disavowal of the accusations in the Doctor’s Plot case. Of course, Rubenstein points out, the regime remained authoritarian, intolerant, and repressive. Nonetheless, the backing away from mass violent terror mattered.

What was not known before the opening of Soviet archives, and what will surprise non-specialist readers greatly, is the openness of the new Soviet leaders to compromise in the Cold War. Beginning with a public call for dialogue with the West by Georgii Malenkov on 15 March 1953, they signaled their readiness to negotiate a variety of issues. They put out feelers about ending the Korean War, loosened travel restrictions between East and West Germany, and acceded to the appointment of Dag Hammarskjöld as Secretary General of the United Nations. Behind the scenes, archives demonstrate, they were discussing the possibility of accepting a neutral, unified Germany. The diplomatic, military, and economic costs of maintaining their East European empire, they understood, were high.

A truce was soon negotiated in the Korean War. Beyond that, however, President Eisenhower and his advisers did not respond meaningfully to Soviet overtures. Rubenstein views this as a tragic lost opportunity, and he blames extreme anti-Communists among Eisenhower’s advisers, in particular Secretary of State John Foster Dulles and Central Intelligence Agency Director Allen Dulles. Both were dismayed by the Soviet peace initiatives, seeing them as a confidence trick designed to lull the West into complacency (as Rubenstein notes, Secretary of State Dulles saw Communism as the greatest threat to “the West” since the rise of Islam). Having dealt in the late 1980s with US naval planners who saw perestroika in precisely this way, I am inclined to agree with Rubenstein.

Rubenstein’s work, here and in previous books, is exemplary of the fusion of scholarship and popular history that the United States desperately needs. He makes use of primary sources, gives credit to other researchers, and presents a complicated history in an original, highly readable manner. One can only hope that more historians will follow his example.


Reviewed by Vladimir Petrović, Institute for Contemporary History, Belgrade

Whatever Balkan specialists might think of Winston Churchill’s observation that this region produces more history than it can consume, they would likely agree that writing Balkan history can be exceptionally demanding. Mastering its linguistic diversity and navigating its volatile archival practices is tough enough, whereas ideological,
geopolitical, and national biases are bending historical insights into autarchic turfs. By custom, this compartmentalization challenge is met through collaborative work, combining the insights of scholars from the region and outside. *Balkans in the Cold War*, a volume edited by Svetozar Rajak, Konstantina Botsiou, Eirini Karamouzi, and Evanthis Hatzivassiliou, follows this model. The editors, based in the United Kingdom and Greece, assembled sixteen contributors. The origins and residences of these authors, ranging from the United States, Great Britain, and the Netherlands to Bulgaria, Greece, Turkey, and the former Yugoslavia, attests to the globalization of Balkan studies. Five of the authors are women, symbolizing much-needed change in this traditionally male-dominated field. The volume also presents a mix of seasoned experts on Balkan affairs together with scholars from the younger generation.

Introducing such an interesting team, the editors state that their work “does not and cannot represent a definitive history of the Balkans in the Cold War. It would be futile and impossible” (p. xx). Instead, recognizing the importance of cultivating ongoing scholarly dialogue about the Balkans, they offer a layered reading of post-war history of the region, grouped around five central topics (“The Balkans and the Creation of the Cold War Order,” “Military Alliances and the Balkans,” “Uneasy Relations with the Superpowers,” “Balkan Dilemmas in the 1970s and 1980s,” and “The ‘Significant Other’: The EEC, and Identity, Culture, Ideology”). These titles are almost deceptively conventional, as their content in several ways extends beyond the state of the art in contemporary Balkan studies.

The book could be fairly evenly divided by the type of innovation it brings. Its first half opens with recognizable topics from Cold War studies—the origins of the Cold War, systems of military alliances, the role of the global players, and local responses in the Balkans—but offers fresh interpretations based on new archival research. The role the Balkans played in the onset of the Cold War is revisited by John Iatrides, who explores U.S. policy toward the region from Washington’s immediate postwar involvement in the Greek Civil War to the Truman Doctrine and Marshall Plan. The coinciding Yugoslav split from Moscow is examined as “a landmark event for the Soviet Union” (p. 29) by Mark Kramer, who looks behind the Iron Curtain to discover the importance of this schism for relations within the Soviet sphere of influence. In the East and in the West, the Balkans were a catalyst for the superpowers’ emerging global commitments. Whereas U.S. officials tested their containment strategy in Greece and Turkey, Josip Stalin used the Yugoslav challenge to Sovietize the satellite system in Eastern Europe and step up the bloc’s military capabilities. Consequently, the Balkans entered the Cold War as an important geopolitical battleground, one of the shortest fuses that could trigger a global conflagration.

The attempts of local players to exploit or transcend this role constitute the overarching topic of the next set of contributions. Rajak explores the zigzags of Yugoslav foreign policy in the 1950s, starting from the short-lived regional cooperation in the Balkan Pact with Greece and Turkey to Josip Broz Tito’s later crucial role in the formation of a nonaligned movement. Another variant of this “flight from the Balkans” is described by Ayşegül Sever, who investigates Turkey’s attempts to position itself as
more than an “ordinary” member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO),
through the Baghdad Pact and Balkan Pact alike. The waning of these scrambles for
alliances by the late 1950s indicates the declining salience of the Balkans, which ac-
cording to Hatzivassiliou, “in NATO analyses . . . was a region of relatively minor
importance that generated low expectations” (p. 90). Jordan Baev confirms that simi-
lar conclusions were reached by Soviet planners, for whom by “the time of the Korean
War the Balkans had lost its strategic priority compared to the time of the Truman
Doctrine” (p. 131). However, despite being much less explosive then the Middle East
or Southeast Asia, the Balkans were hardly static. Just as regional Western allies Greece
and Turkey were beset with mutual conflict, the seeming uniformity of the Balkan
Eastern bloc also concealed deep animosities. These dynamics are explored in the
second half of the book, which boldly examines the more recent and comparatively
underexplored decades of the Cold War.

This black box is opened by Laurien Crump, whose chapter examines how “a
Balkan challenge to the Warsaw pact . . . contributed to the multilateralization of the
former monolith” (p. 166). Crump examines the growing independence of national
Communism in the Balkans, culminating in the 1968 Soviet invasion of Czechoslo-
vakia, which Romania actively opposed and Albania used as a pretext to leave the War-
saw Pact for good. Ivo Banac also discusses the reverberating consequences of the end
of the Prague Spring for Yugoslavia. In addition to surveying Yugoslav foreign policy,
he discusses domestic implications, notably the abandonment of further liberalization
of Titoism. Effie Pedaliu examines the U.S. response to this landmark event, symbol-
ized by President Richard Nixon’s visits to Romania in 1969 and Yugoslavia in 1970.
These moves, she argues, were a harbinger of a U.S. global policy of détente, expressed
in the opening of strategic arms limitation talks with the Soviet Union and the trian-
gulation of Cold War diplomacy through the establishment of relations with China.
Paradoxically though, in Balkan countries “détente raised the fear that their national
interests would be compromised on the altar of superpower cooperation” (p. 206).
Détente therefore forced Balkan countries into both bilateral and multilateral initia-
tives aimed to further regional cooperation.

Most of these frameworks did not endure the test of time, but one that did is
covered extensively in this volume. Although the book devotes surprisingly little at-
tention to the 1973 Helsinki Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe
(CSCE), it generously compensates by opening the long-neglected topic of European
integration. A rich harvest from hitherto unavailable archives, alongside a readiness
to overcome the binary trap that always lurks in Cold War studies, results in an in-
teresting study of the presence of the European Economic Community (EEC) in the
Balkans. Starting with Greece, Eirini Karamouzi details this troubled process from the
Greek association agreement, signed in 1961, but frozen during the military dictator-
ship. Renewed in 1975, the agreement led to full accession in 1981. The simultaneous
determination of the EEC to keep Yugoslavia in its orbit, expressed through a set of
preferential commercial treaties in the 1970s and a cooperation agreement in 1980, is
the subject of Benedetto Zaccaria’s research. He highlights the increased importance
of the region for collective security in the West in light of the 1975 Cyprus crisis, as well as European policymakers’ attempts to situate the Balkans within their emerging joint Mediterranean policy. The exceptional relevance of this period is underscored by Botsiou, who describes it as “a point of no return” (p. 261).

This alone would make for a convincing conclusion had the editors not consciously opted to interrupt a chronological approach and add a fifth and last subsection to the book, consisting of a contribution about the cultural wars in Yugoslavia in the 1950s by Miroslav Perišić, a text on the Macedonian question from 1963 to 1980 by Spyridon Sfetas, and a chapter by Mehmet Döşemec devoted to the ambivalence of Turkey’s turn to Europe in the shadow of military coups and the Cyprus intervention. Interesting as these chapters may be, they seem oddly clustered. I could easily see Perišić in the first and Sfetas in the second half of the book, whereas Döşemec would splendidly complement the Karamouzi and Zaccaria chapters on the EEC in the Balkans. Grouped together however, they seem to indicate the editorial decision to move away from political history and international relations into the realm of cultural history and identity politics. Worthwhile as these topics are, they would surely sit better in a sequel. Rewriting the political history of the Balkans in the Cold War is complicated enough, and a thorough look at its cultural and social aspects surely calls for a separate volume.

This “imperial overstretch” notwithstanding, The Balkans in the Cold War brings refreshing insights and important contributions. Most important, the volume functions well on several analytical levels, moving with apparent ease from a global account of the clash of superpowers through regional and multilateral perspectives to bilateral, national, and even subnational contexts. Such scaling integrates the volume methodologically and fulfills one of the editors’ purposes: to “de-center the Cold War” (p. xx). The volume goes one step further, however, and decenters the Balkans as well, allowing for a more realistic appraisal of this peninsula and its role in the Cold War. Hence, we learn a lot about Stalin’s plans for confrontation in this part of Europe in the early 1950s (Kramer), but also about European (Zaccaria) and U.S. (Pedaliu) regional frameworks for the Balkans in later stages of the Cold War. We read about a spillover of dissidence in the Warsaw Pact (Crump) and about the role of the Balkans in the Pact’s dissolution (Baev), but also about the crisis in Cyprus from both Greek (Karamouzi) and Turkish (Döşemec) perspectives. As the editors promised, these contributions indeed “fill an existing void in the scholarship on the Balkans in the Cold War” (p. xii).

Many gaps remain to be filled, but not everything can fit into a single book. Some aspects of the Balkans remain “A Cold War Mystery,” which is an appropriately entitled concluding essay to the volume, written by Odd Arne Westad. Taking a long view to compare the centrality of the role of the Balkans in the outbreak of the Cold War with the region’s relative irrelevance to its ending, he observes that “in the Balkans, local conflicts kept the Cold War in place, while the Cold War kept local conflicts if not frozen, then contained” (p. 361). In light of the subsequent Yugoslav wars in the Balkans, this conclusion is very fitting; it also echoes the editors’ observation that
“many of the region’s” problems predated the Cold War and in many cases survived it” (p. xix). The Balkan region remains notoriously averse to cooperation and still comes across as surprisingly quarrelsome, given that all of its countries are at this point either members of the European Union or striving to get there. However, in that process the burden of this region’s past is manifesting in ways that are difficult to understand outside historical perspective. With Slovenia and Croatia vigorously disputing a small stretch of maritime boundary, Bosnia struggling to maintain its unity, Serbia not recognizing Kosovo, Greece challenging the very name of its Macedonian neighbors, and Hungary building a fence on its southern border, there is little doubt that this volume presents a relevant and useful read not only for historians of the Cold War but also for all those engaged and interested in contemporary European integration of the Balkans.


Reviewed by Artemy Kalinovsky, University of Amsterdam

Ever since historians turned their attention to U.S.-sponsored modernization programs, one of their most persistent criticisms has been that intellectuals and policymakers extrapolated from Western European and U.S. experience and applied their findings wherever U.S. foreign policy led. The persistent failures of modernization programs could thus be explained in part by the confrontation between neat models proposed in Ivy League universities and government departments and the much more diverse and complicated reality on the ground. Nathan Citino’s marvelous new book, Envisioning the Arab Future: Modernization in U.S.-Arab Relations, 1945–1957, complicates this narrative. Drawing on an impressive array of sources in Arabic and English, Citino argues that Middle Eastern intellectuals were themselves active agents in defining and implementing modernization. He further undermines the one-directional model by showing how the ideas of some of these intellectuals reverberated back in the United States.

As Citino shows, Arab elites traveled the world looking for ideas to transform their own societies. Although these elites had always been mobile, Citino notes, “the speed of post-1945 travel . . . offered Arabs a range of experiences that included opportunities to assess the competing Western development models of capitalism and communism” (p. 20). Both the United States and the Soviet Union were popular destinations. Rarely did the travelers return with an uncritical view of the country they visited. Most famously, the Egyptian intellectual Said Qutb articulated a moral critique of the United States and the Cold War and laid out a vision for a third way guided by Islam. At the same time, many of these elites subscribed to the idea of “modernization as linear, structural change pursued according to a developmental