last year of the fighting and in the months following the July 1953 armistice. However, the relative inattention to the Communist powers sometimes results in the absence of sufficient context to explain U.S. action fully.

It would be unfair to end on anything other than a positive note. Kim has labored tirelessly in archives on three continents and tracked down a significant number of living POWs for productive interviews. She has written a thoughtful book with broad implications for the course of the Cold War in the postcolonial world and promises to become a major figure among the new generation of Korean War scholars determined to reach well beyond those who have preceded them.


Reviewed by Vojtech Mastny, Independent Scholar

Soviet-Indian relations from the early 1940s through the mid-1960s may seem dated as a topic at a time when the Soviet Union is a distant memory and India’s leadership of the Non-Aligned Movement is no longer relevant. Yet, the intriguing continuities between then and now offer insight into the worldviews and diplomatic practices of both Russia and India today. This 767-page volume by Andreas Hilger, a specialist in German-Russian relations and the deputy director of the German Historical Institute in Moscow, offers readers, including policymakers, much material for reflection.

Hilger’s massive book covers the formative period of what both sides hoped would be a “special relationship” under their visionary leaders, Jawaharlal Nehru and Nikita Khrushchev, a relationship that evolved into a less visionary but still special partnership under their successors, Indira Gandhi and Leonid Brezhnev, and those who came after them—a partnership that remained robust until the end of the Soviet Union. The legacy of that partnership has meant that the disintegration of the USSR is bemoaned in India more than anywhere else outside Russia. The book documents in detail the many-sided interactions between the world’s last imperial power and a major developing country in search of its identity—or, more precisely, between their ruling elites—at a time when the Cold War and decolonization unfolded simultaneously.

Originally written to qualify for a professorship at the German military’s Helmut Schmidt University in Hamburg, Hilger’s book draws on an astounding, though still incomplete, variety of archival sources—Russian, Indian, British, U.S., German, even Dutch. The result is an account so rich in detail that one might expect to be overwhelmed, but this is not the case. For a German academic book, it reads very well, applying an apt touch of sarcasm to the behavior of partners as self-consciously insecure as India, an “ungrateful object of imperial ambitions” (p. 640), and the Soviet Union, a subject attempting in vain to fulfill those ambitions. Hilger’s portrayals of
the protagonists are often memorable, none more so than that of the “unstable Nerven-venkostüm” on Nehru’s arrogant and incompetent right-hand man Krishna Menon, “the Hindu Vyshinsky” (p. 116).

In the early years of the budding relationship, naïveté abounded on both sides, whether about the merits of the Soviet economic model or about the compatibility of the two societies. Later on, the relationship was characterized by greater calculation, arguably more rewarding to India during Indira Gandhi’s autocratic moment than to the Soviet Union during Brezhnev’s era of stagnation. During this time, the Soviet Union disseminated propaganda celebrating Indian “new gods” of “Work, Peace, and Friendship,” (p. 615) before both sides returned to the naïveté exemplified by Mikhail Gorbachev’s and Rajiv Gandhi’s exalted images of each other’s country. The unfulfilled expectations on both sides caused enough embarrassment to explain why India’s policy toward the USSR remains “a stepchild of Indian historiography” (p. 32), as Hilger pithily argues.

By design, the book focuses on the Indian-Soviet relationship rather than its wider international implications (p. 20). But it would have been a better choice to leave out some of the details of that relationship and include instead more of the broader picture, even while relying on the existing secondary literature rather than searching for additional primary sources. Indeed, whenever Hilger brings in the wider context, at least briefly, the results are impressive. His concise account of the 1962 Sino-Indian border war, for example, is both well informed and admirably balanced, regardless of the still restricted access to Indian sources and the omission of new evidence from Chinese archives, such as has been used by Huang Yuxing.

One hopes that a second volume, which would bring the subject of Indian-Soviet partnership to its conclusion, is on its way. Hilger can build on the evidence he collected for his essay on East Germany’s and the Soviet bloc’s relations with India from 1971 to 1989, which he published in 2011 on the Parallel History Project website, and on the available Russian sources, some of which have already been used by Sergey Radchenko. Yet the obstacles are daunting. In 2011, Hilger wrote in reference to the 1971 Soviet-Indian friendship treaty that “due to archival conditions in Russia and India, our knowledge about Moscow’s and New Delhi’s ultimate motives behind the agreement remains somewhat sketchy.” That was true then, but in August 2015 many of the relevant Soviet files from the 1960s through the mid-1970s were quietly opened at the Russian State Archive of Recent History (and some also at the Russian Foreign Ministry archive). The situation in the Indian archives remains inauspicious, but the newly available Soviet files are eminently worth consulting.

To make the history of the ambivalent Soviet-Indian relationship politically less sensitive and the hidden evidence more accessible, new feelings of mutual disappointment may be needed as Russia aims to move closer to both China and India in confronting the United States. In the meantime, Hilger’s book serves as a reminder of how difficult it is to forge a lasting relationship between states by their elites without the necessary rapprochement of their people.