

# H-Diplo ROUNDTABLE XXII-4

**Norman M. Naimark.** *Stalin and the Fate of Europe: The Postwar Struggle for Sovereignty.* Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2019. ISBN: 9780674238770 (hardcover, \$29.95/£23.95/€27.00).

21 September 2020 | <https://hdiplo.org/to/RT22-4>

Roundtable Editors: Thomas Maddux and Diane Labrosse | Production Editor: George Fujii

## Contents

---

Introduction by Ronald Grigor Suny, University of Michigan .....	2
Review by Patryk Babiracki, University of Texas at Arlington and New York University .....	5
Review by Hope M. Harrison, The George Washington University .....	8
Review by Mark Kramer, Harvard University .....	11
Review by Elidor Mëhilli, Hunter College of the City University of New York .....	18
Review by Marc Trachtenberg, University of California, Los Angeles .....	21
Response by Norman M. Naimark, Stanford University .....	28

---

 INTRODUCTION BY RONALD GRIGOR SUNY, UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN
 

---

Norman Naimark's latest study on the Cold War both breaks new ground and raises important questions from his commentators and critics. This is a work of a mature scholar, one who has grown older but not tired from his fruitful hours in the archives and his passion for constructing explanatory narratives. Most remarkable is his ability to reassess what has been written before, even in his own earlier works, to go where the evidence leads him, even if it causes discomfort with his preferences, and to search for anomalies that contradict or illuminate what others have concluded, even if they are close colleagues and friends. Naimark's ability to change his mind, and respond to new evidence is on display in this book. What he demonstrates here is a Joseph Stalin who was after the Second World War far more flexible and willing to adjust his views than usually credited by scholars and foreign policy wonks.

Naimark argues that the Sovietization of East Central Europe took place in three distinct stages: first, the years 1944-1947 in which coalition governments existed. In that first period, Communist parties were restrained by the Kremlin from militant, revolutionary action; Soviet pressure limited the resistance of non- or anti-Communists; and Stalin appeared cautious and even cooperative with the West. Things changed radically in 1947-1950 with the declaration of the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan. Stalin reacted by tightening the Soviet grip on Communist parties by organizing the Cominform and expelling Josip Broz Tito's Yugoslavia from the Communist brotherhood, disciplining national Communists, and laying the foundation of a Soviet Bloc. Darkness truly descended for East Central Europe in the third stage, 1950-1953 (or 1956), in which Moscow effectively Stalinized the Bloc and used terror and coercion, the execution of national Communists, and full control from the Kremlin over the now satellite states. In his seven case studies Naimark effectively undermines the idea that there was a clear blueprint by Stalin to impose a tight imperial hold on the bordering countries. Perhaps the brutal dictator preferred that all along, but his pragmatism and realism constrained him and limited any utopian ambitions to spread Soviet rule. In contrast to some of his earlier writings, as Marc Tractenberg points out, in this work Naimark's views have shifted. Now they are closer to the revisionism of his fellow Cold War scholar Melvin Leffler than to the dean of so-called post-revisionism, John Lewis Gaddis, who in his work has retreated back to a safe, liberal, orthodox position: it was Stalin and his paranoia that lay at the base of the Cold War.<sup>1</sup>

His interlocutors in this forum have astutely pointed out the lacunae in Naimark's argument, the cases that he should have considered, the incidents that would have perhaps led him in a different direction. I am not so sure. Let's consider the book that Norman Naimark actually wrote instead of the one he might have written. In *Stalin and the Fate of Europe*, Naimark carefully demonstrates how deeply reciprocal international relations are: the Soviets reacted as often as they acted. The variation in his cases, from Bornholm to Finland to Austria, demonstrate that Soviet policy was highly contingent rather than the result of any blueprint to conquer and rule. Within the broad framework of a Realpolitik notion of a sphere of influence, Stalin considered many possible arrangements, including a Finlandization solution; withdrawal, as in Bornholm; and the Czechoslovak model of a full takeover.

Here the cases left out, the ones that Mark Kramer regrets were not included, namely Rumania and Bulgaria, only confirm Naimark's point that flexibility and contingency, opportunity and the agency of local actors, played key roles in the varying scenarios. Up to 1947 and the Truman doctrine, Stalin seemed to have believed in the possibility of some kind of East-West condominium over parts of Europe and Asia and strongly desired better relations with his wartime allies, as well as loans and reparations to rebuild the USSR. I would go that important step further than Naimark and add that that second part of his

---

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Norman M. Naimark, *The Russians in Germany: A History of the Soviet Zone of Occupation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997); and Norman Naimark and Leonid Gibiansky, (eds.), *Establishment of Communist Regimes in Eastern Europe, 1944-1949* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1996); Melvyn P. Leffler, *For the Soul of Mankind: The United States, the Soviet Union, and the Cold War* (New York: Hill & Wang, 2007); John Lewis Gaddis, *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

ambitions would be thwarted by the Western leaders as they became ever more intolerant of Soviet advances in Eastern Europe.

Reading this book led me to appreciate five propositions (call them contributions) that Naimark's masterful narratives add to our understanding of the Soviet role in the origins of the Cold War. First and most powerfully, Stalin was as reactive as he was proactive, perhaps even more so. He responded to changing circumstances, reassessed situations, and was capable of changing his mind. What looks like deception because the dictator said something at one moment but did not follow through can sensibly be seen as a reaction to changed circumstances. A second proposition is that Stalin's policies shifted but there were underlying consistencies that can be discerned, which stemmed from his Marxist outlook. Rather than considering ideology as dogma, it is more fruitful to see Stalin's Marxism as a lens through which he perceived and understood the world. Marxism, which he wore lightly and manipulated when it suited him, was his basic sociology and helped him diagnose the relations of forces in a conflictual way. After all, Marxism is a theory of war, class war, and in Stalin's Weltanschauung, a war of systems. His own reading of Marxism fit into his particularly suspicious nature, encouraged his paranoid tendencies, and contrasted with other Communists whose more idealistic or utopian Marxism fed their optimism about the future (and perhaps left them disarmed before the pragmatic realism of Stalin).

Naimark shows conclusively that Stalin was not interested in promoting revolution, at least not at the cost of Soviet state security. His realpolitik was usually quite cautious. A top priority was to establish a Soviet sphere of influence in East Central Europe from Germany to the Soviet border, and he was willing to pay a high price for it, eventually alienating the West as well as some of his most loyal Communists. A fourth proposition is that Stalin wanted a relationship of cooperation with the West. Indeed, he needed the West and its material resources to rebuild the devastated Soviet space and to prevent another war with the USSR. But he was unwilling to secure that cooperation at any cost. Ultimately he was unable to have both a security zone and an East-West condominium. Europe was divided for the next half century.

Finally, Naimark's history is open-ended, neither fatalistic nor overdetermined. There were many possible outcomes, and few could have predicted in 1945 that division and nuclear standoff was in the future. Within limits Stalin was willing to tolerate different degrees of control, even where his army was on the ground. At first he tolerated different forms of hegemony – Finlandization, an agreement not to base troops on Bornholm, a united neutral Germany, people's democracies – but after 1947 he reacted against perceived advances by the West, particularly the United States, and moved to empire, the full control of domestic and foreign policy of the satellite states.

Naimark's sober contributions to the history of the Cold War have energized the story of the breakdown of the Grand Alliance by adding to an often one-sided story his knowledge of the other side. He brings the Europeans back onto the stage, even though, sadly, the principals, the Great Powers, usurped the leading roles for themselves. Once President Harry Truman and Stalin started reading from their own scripts, the struggle for sovereignty withered into a contest between the Soviets and the Americans.

#### **Participants:**

**Norman M. Naimark** is Robert and Florence McDonnell Professor of East European Studies in the History Department at Stanford University, and is Senior Fellow at the Hoover Institution and the Freeman-Spogli Institute. A selection of his books includes: *Terrorists and Social Democrats: The Russian Revolutionary Movement under Alexander III* (Harvard University Press, 1981); *The Russians in Germany: A History of the Soviet Zone of Germany* (Harvard University Press, 1995); *Fires of Hatred; Ethnic Cleansing in 20th Century Europe* (Harvard University Press, 2001); and *Stalin's Genocides* (Princeton University Press, 2010); *Genocide: A World History* (Oxford University Press, 2017); *Stalin and the Fate of Europe: The Postwar Struggle for Sovereignty* (Harvard University Press, 2019). He is presently working on a book manuscript tentatively entitled *Why Genocide*.

**Ronald Grigor Suny** is the William H. Sewell Jr. Distinguished University Professor of History and Professor of Political Science at the University of Michigan and Emeritus Professor of Political Science and History at the University of Chicago.

He is the author of *The Baku Commune, 1917-1918: Class and Nationality in the Russian Revolution* (Princeton University Press, 1972); *Armenia in the Twentieth Century* (Scholars Press, 1983); *The Making of the Georgian Nation* (Indiana University Press, 1988, 1994); *Looking Toward Ararat: Armenia in Modern History* (Indiana University Press, 1993); *The Revenge of the Past: Nationalism, Revolution, and the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (Stanford University Press, 1993); *The Soviet Experiment: Russia, the USSR, and the Successor States* (Oxford University Press, 1998, 2011); “*They Can Live in the Desert But Nowhere Else*”: *A History of the Armenian Genocide* (Princeton University Press, 2015) [Winner of the Wayne S. Vucinich Book Prize from the Association for Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies for the most important contribution to Russian, Eurasian, and East European studies in any discipline of the humanities or social sciences]; co-author with Valerie Kivelson of *Russia’s Empires* (Oxford University Press, 2017); and author of *Red Flag Unfurled: Historians, the Russian Revolution, and the Soviet Experiment* (Verso Books, 2017); *Red Flag Wounded: Stalinism and the Fate of the Soviet Experiment* (Verso Books, 2020); and *Stalin: Passage to Revolution* (Princeton University Press, 2020).

**Patryk Babiracki** is Associate Professor in Russian and East European history at the University of Texas at Arlington and author of *Soviet Soft Power in Poland: Culture and the Making of Stalin’s New Empire, 1943-1957* (University of North Carolina Press, 2015). He also co-edited two collections of essays devoted to transnational history of socialism, authored articles in academic and popular periodicals, including *New Eastern Europe*, *The Washington Post* and *The Wilson Quarterly*. Babiracki’s current project (supported by the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation) re-examines Poland’s twentieth-century history in its global context, through the lens of the Poznań International Trade Fair. In the spring of 2020, Babiracki is Visiting Scholar at NYU’s Center for European and Mediterranean Studies.

**Hope M. Harrison** is Professor of History & International Affairs at The George Washington University. She is the author of *Driving the Soviets up the Wall: Soviet-East German Relations, 1953-61* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), *After the Berlin Wall: Memory and the Making of the New Germany, 1989 to the Present* (Cambridge University Press, 2019), and a variety of articles on the Cold War, Germany, and Russia. Her current research interests are focused on life and death along East Germany’s Baltic coast.

**Mark Kramer** is Director of Cold War Studies at Harvard University and a Senior Fellow and Director of the Sakharov Human Rights Series at Harvard’s Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies. He is also Editor of the *Journal of Cold War Studies*, a quarterly journal published by MIT Press. He is the co-editor of a forthcoming book on *European Neutrality and the Soviet Union during the Cold War* and is also the editor and lead author of three forthcoming volumes on *The Fate of Communist Regimes, 1989-1991*.

**Elidor Mëhilli** is Associate Professor of European and international history at Hunter College of the City University of New York. He received a Ph.D. from Princeton University and has been a visiting scholar at Columbia University, New York University, and at Birkbeck, University of London. His book *From Stalin to Mao: Albania and the Socialist World* (Cornell University Press, 2017) received the Marshall D. Shulman Book Prize, the Davis Center Book Prize, and the Stavros Skendi Book Prize.

**Marc Trachtenberg**, an historian by training, is now a Research Professor of Political Science at UCLA. He is the author of a number of books and more than fifty articles dealing mostly with twentieth-century international politics. His article “The United States and Eastern Europe in 1945: A Reassessment” appeared in the Fall 2008 issue of the *Journal of Cold War Studies*. In May 2009 H-Diplo published a roundtable on that article in which Professor Naimark participated.

Norman Naimark's voice has been critical in defining the scholarship on Soviet-East European relations. Especially influential is his *Russians in Germany: A History of the Soviet Zone of Occupation, 1945-1949*; based on the then-newly declassified documents, it was the first major treatment of political, social and cultural relations between the Soviets and Germans living in the Soviet zone of occupation in Germany.<sup>1</sup> Naimark's attention to the institutional problems, cultural challenges, and social limitations on the Soviet side has been groundbreaking, if only because it consistently challenged the pervasive sense of complacency which many Western commentators have inherited from the Cold War, and which rested on the erroneous notion that politics behind the iron curtain were simple. As Naimark has shown in his earlier works and now in *Stalin and the Fate of Europe*, they were anything but.

In *Stalin and the Fate of Europe*, Naimark draws on recent scholarship, his own archival research, and years of participation in debates that included Western, Russian and East European scholars, to explore the Soviet leader's complicated relationships with European politicians after the Second World War. His central and most thought provoking claim is that in the immediate postwar period that spanned years 1945 to 1949 "there was greater fluidity and openness to postwar settlement in Europe than is often assumed both in the historiography and in public memory" (8). Each chapter in the book aims to demonstrate "the agency of the Europeans, communists and noncommunists alike, as they struggled for sovereignty on a continent increasingly dominated by the Cold War (23). Naimark argues that Soviet leader Joseph Stalin was more flexible on the questions of postwar order in Europe; conversely, he suggests, European leaders had more power to shape the postwar developments than many have been willing to recognize.

The book consists of seven case studies, some better and some less known. The former include a chapter on the Berlin blockade of 1948-1949, a chapter on Stalin's response to the U.S. intervention in the Italian elections in 1948, and one on Polish Communist Władysław Gomułka's challenge to the Stalinist orthodoxy through insisting on a so-called 'Polish road to socialism.' Less known episodes include an analysis of Stalin's rather reconciliatory attitude with regards to a strategically-placed Danish island of Bornholm, a chapter on the Albanian leader Enver Hoxha's skillful manipulation of Yugoslav leader Josip Broz Tito and Stalin in the postwar years, and a chapter on how Finnish leaders managed to forge a mutually acceptable *modus vivendi* with Stalin. The final chapter is devoted to the ambiguities of Austria's relationship to the USSR.

The book's major achievement, I would suggest, is that it demonstrates, through compelling evidence and in clear prose, a diverse spectrum of encounters between the Soviet leader and political leaders throughout the European continent. *Stalin and the Fate of Europe* masterfully shows Stalin's differentiated relations with various European politicians and his ability to react to changing circumstances in unique ways. We learn about how Stalin's non-Communist partners and Communist associates represented an extremely diverse mix of temperaments, experiences, political acumen and ethnicities, all of which played an important role after the war, and in many cases decided a given person's path to success or political and physical demise. Consequently, the book depicts the postwar continent as a land defined by shifting and contested battle lines; a political universe that resembles less a clash between good and evil, and more an epic game of three-dimensional chess, or perhaps a giant, elaborate mechanism filled with countless delicate elements and moving parts.

There are many ways to approach this thought-provoking work, but perhaps any discussion of Stalin's role in shaping of the postwar order should begin with the obvious: there is no hard evidence concerning his plans with regards to Europe. As Naimark reminds us, we do not really know whether "Stalin had a preconceived plan for creating a bloc of countries in Europe with a common Soviet-style system" (6). In fact, there is very little evidence concerning just about anything having to do with Soviet foreign policy after World War II, except perhaps the general agreement that Stalin was very much interested in ensuring the security of the Soviet state, which was thoroughly destroyed during the war and which Stalin correctly saw as vulnerable in many ways. Otherwise, Stalin left no intimate diaries; he liked to operate secretly, often giving

---

<sup>1</sup> Norman Naimark, *The Russians in Germany: A History of the Soviet Zone of Occupation, 1945-1949* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1995).

dispositions in person or by telephone; to the extent that he had dictatorial powers over all decision-making bodies in the USSR, any policy recommendations and resolutions made at meetings of various institutions (be it the Communist Party, the government, the military or the secret police) were hardly binding, because Stalin could override them at any time. Stalin was not beholden to public opinion, certainly not in the USSR; he did not have to worry about legality, because wherever his subordinates controlled the institutions of coercion, he was the law. The Soviet leader lied often and well, regularly murdering people and then publicly pretending that he had nothing to do with their death. Of his postwar plans with regards to Eastern Europe and Poland in particular, Stalin said many contradictory things to various individuals, depending on what he thought had to be said in order to get his interlocutors to cooperate.<sup>2</sup> Stalinist foreign policy was often confusing, frequently contradictory, and ultimately Kafkaesque; in order to say anything meaningful about it one must fall back on sophisticated exegetic techniques. *Stalin and the Fate of Europe* is such a high-wire act of interpretive scholarship; by definition, therefore, it also leaves room for discussion of the significance of the negotiations and contingencies it describes.

Thus, there were a few moments in the book that I found difficult to reconcile immediately with Naimark's thesis about the open-ended nature of postwar history. For instance, Naimark acknowledges that ideology shaped Stalin's thinking to a great degree and notes, quoting John Lewis Gaddis (who echoes a longstanding orthodox argument), that "as long as Stalin was running the Soviet Union a cold war was unavoidable" (8).<sup>3</sup> He also points out that Germany and Poland were Stalin's top priorities; yet five out of seven case studies in the book deal with areas to which Stalin attached considerably less weight. Stalin gambled over Berlin by imposing the Blockade; but his top security priority was Germany—did not it make perfect sense for him to reject a unified, neutral German state based on the conclusion that whoever would come to control it, would gain the upper hand in any future conflict, hot or cold? In the Polish case, Stalin saved Gomulka; however, did he not do so, as Naimark suggests persuasively, out of fear of further skewing the balance in the top echelons of the Polish United Workers' Party in favor of Jewish Communists—and therefore (given his understanding of the issue) with calculated self-interest in mind? Moreover, Stalin may have entertained the possibility of creating a left-wing parliamentary democracy (a 'new,' 'popular,' or 'people's democracy' distinct from the Soviet-style mono party-state) in Poland, as several esteemed Russian and Western historians have argued.<sup>4</sup> But does not it matter that *in practice*, and from the moment he turned his attention to Poland in the winter of 1942-43, Stalin unflinchingly supported the Polish Communists' bid for hegemonic power in a manner that not only violated the Yalta agreements, but also that had little to do with democratic ways? Given Stalin's priorities and knowledge of Polish attitudes to the USSR, was there really any chance that he believed in the formula that had been forged at Yalta, and which stipulated that Poland had to be 'democratic' and yet 'friendly' to the USSR? Recognizing the irony, Naimark points out that decades later, Stalin's Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Molotov himself was closer to the Western traditionalist view (139). References to these more skeptical interpretations by Western, East European and even some Russian historians appear throughout *Stalin and the Fate of Europe*. But since these other explanations are so relevant to the book's overarching thesis, I was hoping to see them addressed a bit more extensively, as a way of avoiding ambiguities. In short, *Stalin and the Fate of Europe* makes a compelling case that some aspects of postwar history could have developed differently. But it also leaves two questions open, I think. How meaningful would these changes really have been? And, is it possible that a certain critical mass of other factors, converging over decades, if not centuries, ultimately also created more or less fixed points of no return?

---

<sup>2</sup> This is the point often stressed by Leonid Gibianskii. See, for example, "Issledovaniia politiki SSSR v Vostochnoi Evrope v kontse Vtoroi Mirovoi Voyny i v pervye poslevoennye gody," *Voprosy istorii* no. 6 (2004): 148-160.

<sup>3</sup> See, e.g., Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., "Origins of the Cold War," *Foreign Affairs* 46:1 (October 1967): 22-52.

<sup>4</sup> For a range of positions, see two collections of essays: Tatiana V. Volokitina, Galina Murashko and Albina Noskova, eds., *Narodnaia demokratiia: mifili real'nost?* (Moscow: Nauka, 1993); Vladimir Tismaneanu, ed., *Stalinism Revisited: The Establishment of Communist Regimes in East-Central Europe* (Budapest and New York: Central European University Press, 2009).

What I like the most about Naimark's stimulating new work is that it invites these kinds of questions about sources, methods and even philosophical underpinnings of the historical craft. With its razor-sharp focus on the Soviet leader and the European issues, the book will become a major reference point in the debates about postwar European and global history. Even those readers of *Stalin and the Fate of Europe* who might disagree with some of the book's premises or conclusions will pause and reflect on the possibilities and limitations of counterfactual thinking. Certainly, the book encourages us to re-consider the central issue of the twentieth century, and to keep our minds open about the seemingly foregone conclusions and inevitable conflicts in the twenty first.

## REVIEW BY HOPE M. HARRISON, THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

It is a pleasure to read Norman Naimark's latest book. His writing on the postwar drama playing out between the locals in seven European countries (including Denmark's Bornholm Island, Albania, Finland, Italy, Germany, Poland, and Austria) and the victors of World War II is quite evocative. Naimark's mission is to do precisely what I am always telling my (ever younger!) students to do: forget what you know about the division of Europe into two blocs with the Cold War and consider what it was actually like to be in Europe without knowing what was going to happen each week or each month, to say nothing of each year and in each election.

But do not be fooled by the title, as I initially was. This book is not just about Soviet leader Joseph Stalin's policies toward Europe. If you think it is, you will be scratching your head in confusion, since some of the countries Naimark writes about were not a priority for Stalin—or at least pushing hard to communize them while risking major confrontation with the West was not a priority for him. Falling into a long line of historians taking Stalin as a starting point for understanding what went on in Europe in the early postwar years, including the start of the Cold War, Naimark does not stop there.<sup>1</sup> Rather he devotes equal attention to the actions of the Europeans themselves in recovering or maintaining sovereignty. From the evidence the author presents it is often difficult, however, to conclude that their actions mattered more than those of the great powers.

The author draws on U.S., Russian, Italian, British and German archives and a wide variety of secondary sources to craft his narrative. Although Naimark notes that the “diversity” of the seven countries he covers “makes it difficult to generalize and draw broad conclusions” (267), the overall narrative of the book generally adds up to more than the sum of its parts by emphasizing the relative openness of political developments in Europe (including in Stalin's policies) until 1948-1949.

Naimark follows in the footsteps of scholars such as Vladislav Zubok and Melvyn P. Leffler, who have maintained that Stalin had no master plan in Central and Eastern Europe (6) in the immediate postwar period other than wanting friendly countries on his borders and seeking to avoid war with the West.<sup>2</sup> On the origins of the Cold War, Naimark clearly believes that the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan (17), to say nothing of Western plans to establish West Germany (160, 164, 193-94),<sup>3</sup> did as much to contribute to the Cold War as the brutal policies of the Red Army in Germany,<sup>4</sup> Austria, Poland and elsewhere. Naimark argues that it was not until 1948-49 (following the Marshall Plan announcement in June 1947, the Czech coup of February 1948, the Berlin blockade and airlift of 1948-1949, and the establishment of NATO and

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Vladislav M. Zubok and Constantine Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War: From Stalin to Khrushchev* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997); John Lewis Gaddis, “The Tragedy of Cold War History: Reflections on Revisionism,” *Foreign Affairs* 73:1 (January/February 1994), 142-54; Gerhard Wettig, *Stalin and the Cold War in Europe: The Emergence and Development of East-West Conflict, 1939-1953* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007).

<sup>2</sup> Zubok, *A Failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007); Melvyn P. Leffler, *For the Soul of Mankind: The United States, the Soviet Union, and the Cold War* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2007).

<sup>3</sup> On the role of the Marshall Plan in leading Stalin to conclude that Western intentions were hostile to Soviet interests, see Scott D. Parrish and Mikhail M. Narinsky, “New Evidence on the Soviet Rejection of the Marshall Plan, 1947: Two Reports,” *Cold War International History Project Working Paper* 9 (March 1994); Benn Steil, *The Marshall Plan: Dawn of the Cold War* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2018). On Western plans to create West Germany marking a key moment in the Cold War which pushed Stalin in turn to create East Germany, see Carolyn Woods Eisenberg, *Drawing the Line: The American Decision to Divide Germany, 1944-1949* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

<sup>4</sup> Naimark's previous work, *The Russians in Germany: A History of the Soviet Zone of Occupation, 1945-1949* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1997), contains a plethora of detail on the brutality of the Soviet occupation of Germany.



West Germany in the spring of 1949) that the Cold War in Europe was widely perceived and engaged in by political leaders and citizens on both sides of the Iron Curtain. This book details the policies (or sometimes lack of a policy) of the great powers (particularly the Soviets, but sometimes also the Americans and the British) and the locals that led to the stance of each of the seven countries in the Cold War, with three joining or being close to the Soviet bloc (Albania, Finland, and Poland), three joining the Western bloc (Denmark, Italy, and West Germany), and one becoming neutral (Austria).

For experts on each of the seven countries Naimark examines, *Stalin and the Fate of Europe* does not offer much that is new in describing what he calls their “postwar struggle for sovereignty.” Rather, he portrays the wide range of developments in areas where the Soviets had either troops or the benefit of a strong Communist party after World War II. His first case study describes the process leading the Soviets to withdraw their troops from the Danish island of Bornholm in the spring of 1946 in return for Danish financial compensation and promises they would not let any foreign power base troops there, a promise Denmark kept after joining NATO. On the one hand, Naimark highlights the role of the smart, careful treatment of the Soviets on the island by the Danes in making the former think they could trust the promises of the latter, but on the other hand, the author also makes clear that Stalin gained other key bases on the Baltic Sea and did not feel it was necessary to hold on to Bornholm. So how important were the actions of the Danes? Different readers may come to different conclusions.

Similarly, in the case of Albania, Naimark argues that initially Stalin showed little interest in Albania, but when he felt that Josip Broz Tito’s Yugoslavia was acting unilaterally and might take over Albania and risk war with the West by deploying troops at Albania’s border with Greece, Stalin made sure that Albania remained independent. Again, did Albanian independence stem from the behavior of Albanians including that of party leader Enver Hoxha, or the policies of Stalin and Tito? This chapter seems to demonstrate the latter.

The chapter on Italy continues the theme of Stalin’s goal of avoiding war with the West. In this case, Palmiro Togliatti, the leader of the Italian Communist Party (PCI), the most popular Communist party in Western Europe, consistently resisted calls from others in the PCI to use violence in their struggle for power, wanting to avoid a civil war which might end up dividing the country and pulling in other powers. Stalin also sought to refrain from provocative actions in Italy which could lead the U.S. to step in militarily. Accordingly, in this instance Stalin and Togliatti were generally in agreement, which was not always true for Stalin and local Communist leaders, as Naimark’s chapters on Austria and Poland demonstrate.

The one case Naimark considers where Stalin undertook serious military action to defend the Soviet role on the ground, that of the 1948-1949 Berlin blockade, completely backfired on the Soviet leader.<sup>5</sup> Stalin intended his blockade of West Berlin to halt Western plans to create a separate West German state, but instead this aggressive move inspired the West to accelerate plans to create both the Federal Republic of Germany and NATO. Was it the actions of the West Berliners and particularly the charismatic orator and soon-to-be mayor Ernst Reuter which prevented the collapse of West Berlin and its take-over by the Communists, surrounded as it was by the Soviet occupation zone of Germany, or was it the airlift operated by the U.S. and Great Britain which preserved the ‘sovereignty’ of West Berlin? It was of course both, although Naimark seems to privilege the actions of the West Berliners in order to show the agency of the Europeans in achieving sovereignty.

*Stalin and the Fate of Europe* is rich in detail and gives the reader a real sense of early postwar developments within the seven European countries profiled in the book. The reader is struck by Stalin’s direct involvement as “a micromanager” (9), as Naimark puts it, in policy toward individual European countries. Part of that micromanagement was to make sure none of his European (or Asian)<sup>6</sup> allies would act in such a way as to provoke a Western military response which could lead to war

---

<sup>5</sup> On the Berlin blockade and airlift, see W.R. Smyser, *From Yalta to Berlin: The Cold War Struggle over Germany* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 1999); Richard Reeves, *Daring Young Men: The Heroism and Triumph of the Berlin Airlift, June 1948-May 1949* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010); Gerhard Wettig, *Bereitschaft zu Einheit in Freiheit? Die sowjetische Deutschlandpolitik 1945-1955* (Munich: Olzog, 1999).

<sup>6</sup> On Stalin’s agreement to the North Korean attack on South Korea in June 1950 based on assurances by North Korean leaders that the U.S. would not get involved, see Kathryn Weathersby, “Soviet Aims in Korea and the Origins of the Korean War, 1945-1950:

between the Soviet Union and the West. Thus, Stalin was particularly concerned that Tito's military moves on the border between Albania and Greece, which the Soviet leader understood the West would assume he sanctioned, could result in a U.S. military response during the 1948 U.S. election campaign season (72-73). Although Stalin urged or insisted on caution on the part of his allies, he seemingly threw that caution aside with the Berlin blockade, an indication of how much he hoped to prevent the creation of a West German state, a state he knew would be allied with the Western Powers and which he feared might threaten the Soviet Union as Nazi Germany had.

While the reader does not always get the sense from Naimark's account that the Europeans had serious control over their fate if the Soviet Union or U.S. had strong security concerns regarding their countries, the reader does see a variety of approaches political leaders and others in seven European countries took toward managing relations with the superpowers and grappling with divisions within their own countries. The strength of the book is Naimark's vivid depiction of the interaction between domestic developments in these countries and international (particularly Soviet) influence.

---

New Evidence from Russian Archives," Working Paper No. 8, Cold War International History Project, Washington, D.C. (November 1993). <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/publication/ACFB76.pdf>.

## REVIEW BY MARK KRAMER, HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Norman Naimark has produced a first-rate book—lapidary, engaging, and concise. The broad topic covered in the book has been discussed many times before (including by Naimark himself), but *Stalin and the Fate of Europe* approaches it in a new way and offers a cogent, valuable analysis. Even for those who might disagree with some of Naimark's arguments, this is a crucial book to read. The issues it raises are of fundamental importance for understanding the origins of the Cold War, which both began and ended in Europe.

The book consists of an introduction, seven case studies, and a conclusion. The cases include the Soviet Union's occupation of Bornholm, a Danish island in the Baltic sea, in 1945; Soviet policy toward Albania in the lead-up to the Soviet-Yugoslav split in 1948; Finland's escape from total Soviet domination (and even potential absorption into the USSR) after 1945; Soviet policy vis-à-vis the Italian elections in 1948; the USSR's blockade of Berlin in 1948-1949; Soviet policy toward Poland; and Soviet policy toward Austria during the early years of its decade-long division into occupation zones. The concluding chapter draws the threads of the book together, but readers can also peruse each case study as a stand-alone account of how the Soviet Union dealt with a European country in the early post-1945 period. The book is more than the sum of its parts, but each part can be usefully examined on its own terms.

The aim of the book is to reassess Joseph Stalin's policy toward Europe (mainly the eastern part of Europe) from the closing months of the European campaigns of the Second World War through the end of the 1940s. The opening chapter sets the scene for the book, offering a thorough overview of Stalin's outlook and goals and the wider context in Europe. Naimark vividly sketches the devastation, dislocation, and immense hardship left by the war — conditions that both constrained and gave opportunities to the political elites who emerged in the early postwar period. Naimark, like many other scholars, believes that Stalin in 1945 did not have a blueprint or 'master plan' for Soviet policy toward Europe, not even toward the East European countries. Naimark shares the view of scholars such as Marc Trachtenberg, Adam Ulam, Michael Cox, and Carolyn Kennedy-Pipe that Stalin was mainly out to establish spheres of influence in Europe.<sup>1</sup>

Naimark sees the Stalinization of Eastern Europe as having been driven entirely by circumstances rather than a preconceived design, but this does not square well with the experiences of Romania and Bulgaria, both of which had Communist rulers imposed on them right after Soviet troops entered in 1944. Stalinization seems to have been a foregone conclusion in at least those two countries. Naimark is judicious and fair when presenting some alternative views to his own in the recent literature.<sup>2</sup> My own view is closer to Leonid Gibianskii's and Jochen Laufer's than to Naimark's on the matter, but this is mostly a matter of degree. Naimark presents the differences between these perspectives sufficiently clearly (albeit very briefly) to allow readers to decide for themselves.

The number of potential case studies is relatively limited (no more than a few dozen), and seven is therefore a significant percentage. Naimark says in the introduction that he selected the seven cases "because I thought they would provide a diverse set of interesting, enlightening, and even provocative examples" (22-23). Fortunately, the sampling criteria are more intricate than that, falling along several different axes: In three of the cases, the Soviet Union deployed troops but eventually pulled them out (Bornholm, Finland, Austria); in two of the cases the Soviet Union deployed troops and did not pull them

<sup>1</sup> Marc Trachtenberg, "The United States and Eastern Europe in 1945: A Reassessment," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 10:4 (Fall 2008): 94-132; Adam B. Ulam, "A Few Unresolved Mysteries about Stalin and the Cold War in Europe: A Modest Agenda for Research," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 1:1 (Spring 1999): 110-116; and Michael Cox and Caroline Kennedy-Pipe, "The Tragedy of American Diplomacy? Rethinking the Marshall Plan," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 7:1 (Winter 2005): 97-134.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Leonid Gibianskii's essays in L. Ya. Gibianskii, ed., *U istokov 'sotsialisticheskogo sodruzhestva': SSSR i vostochnoevropéiskie strany v 1944-1949 gg.* (Moscow: Nauka, 1995); Jochen Laufer, *Pax Sovietica: Stalin, die Westmächte und die deutsche Frage 1941-1945* (Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 2009); and Gerhard Wettig, *Stalin and the Cold War in Europe: The Emergence and Development of East-West Conflict: 1939-1953* (Lanham.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2008).

out until the 1990s (Poland, Berlin); in one case the Soviet Union supported the rise of a Communist regime but did not deploy any Soviet troops (Albania); in two cases the countries were founding members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (Denmark and Italy); and in three cases Stalin considered backing Communist takeovers but ultimately decided not to (Finland, Italy, Austria). This last group of countries included one in which Stalin never deployed any troops (Italy).

Other cases could have been chosen—for example, the case of Greece would have shed light on Stalin’s larger ambitions and goals in southeastern Europe and the Mediterranean. Stalin supported the Greek Communist guerrillas in a highly destructive civil war but ultimately decided not to provide the decisive backing needed for them to defeat their opponents and seize power in Athens.

Although Naimark was wise to choose Albania (and thus also Yugoslavia via its domineering posture toward Albania), the omission of Bulgaria and Romania is regrettable. The inclusion of one or the other would have been a useful example of a Balkan country in which Stalin used the Red Army to install a Soviet-style regime even before World War II ended.<sup>3</sup> Such a case would have provided a useful contrast to Albania, a Balkan country that also fell under Soviet-style rule, but without the direct involvement of Soviet troops.

The case of Czechoslovakia would have been an illuminating example of a country that lived under a democratic polity before the war and for three years after the war until it underwent a Soviet-backed Communist takeover in February 1948, albeit without the direct involvement of Soviet troops. Czechoslovakia was so accommodating toward Soviet interests prior to February 1948 — Czechoslovak Foreign Minister Jan Masaryk lamented at one point that even when he went down “on [his] knees” before Moscow “this is still not enough for the Russians”<sup>4</sup> — that one almost wonders whether the Soviet Union in the long run would have been better off keeping a relationship with Czechoslovakia akin to the relationship that Stalin forged with Finland, as described by Naimark.

The case of Great Britain would have expanded the geographic scope of Naimark’s study westward and would have included a case of a European country that was closely aligned with the United States and a wartime ally of the Soviet Union. Interestingly, the map of “Postwar Europe” on page 7 leaves out Britain.

All that said, Naimark could not include everything, and the seven cases he has chosen are eminently worthwhile. They do, as he says, “point to the diversity and complexity of Stalin’s aims on the continent” in the final year and first several years after World War II (24). All of the cases are very well-researched and well argued.

Of the seven cases, the one that will be least familiar to most readers is that of Bornholm. The literature on the security implications of Bornholm is exiguous, with the handful of studies written by Danish scholars, usually in Danish (and therefore largely unread). The most important study of Stalin’s policy toward Bornholm is a large book by Bengt Jensen, a well-known Danish scholar. The book is in Danish, but Naimark was fortunate that a translation of it appeared in Russian. The translated edition, which Naimark skillfully uses, significantly enriches Naimark’s own analysis, as he readily acknowledges. Naimark also draws on a wealth of other sources, including declassified Soviet documents, declassified U.S. and British documents (notably some key items featured in a thick collection published in Denmark), memoirs, published

---

<sup>3</sup> Dennis Deletant, *Romania under Communism: Paradox and Degeneration* (New York: Routledge, 2019), esp. 29-88; Vladimir Tismaneanu, *Stalinsim for All Seasons: A Political History of Romanian Communism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); Yelena Valeva, “The CPSU the Comintern, and the Bulgarians,” and Vladimir Volkov, “The Soviet Leadership and Southeastern Europe,” both in Norman M. Naimark and Leonid Gibianskii, eds., *The Establishment of Communist Regimes in Eastern Europe, 1944-1949* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1997), 41-54 and 55-72, respectively; and Vesselin Dimitrov, *Stalin’s Cold War: Soviet Foreign Policy, Democracy and Communism in Bulgaria, 1941-48* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

<sup>4</sup> Charles E. Bohlen, *Witness to History 1929-1969* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1973), 214.

sources, and other items. It is a very thoroughly researched and well-argued chapter that sets a high standard for the subsequent case studies.

The only questionable point in the Bornholm chapter comes at the end, when Naimark contends that Danes' desire not to see the Soviet Union return to Bornholm accounts for why Denmark banned NATO military exercises and the deployment of allied troops on the island and in the surrounding waters. This may well be true, but Naimark fails to take account of how sharp a break Denmark's decision to join NATO in 1949 was with the long tradition of Danish security policy, which centered on neutrality. In that sense, the only lasting effect of the occupation on Danish security policy in subsequent decades was not one of restraint. On the contrary, Soviet heavy-handedness in Bornholm was one of the main factors that induced Danish policymakers to break with their long-engrained tradition of neutrality and join NATO in April 1949 after a planned Scandinavian Defense Union with Sweden and Norway failed to materialize.<sup>5</sup> Whether as part of a Scandinavian Defense Union or as a member of NATO, Danish officials did not want to face the Soviet Union on their own after 1946, and this was in no small part the result of the trauma of the 1945-1946 occupation of Bornholm.

Naimark's chapter on Albania offers a valuable look at Stalin's proclivity for changing his mind about the desirable configuration of southeastern Europe after World War II. The situation in and around Albania toward the end of the war was complex, with numerous countries, including all of the great powers (the USSR, the United States, and Britain), one medium power (Italy), and several smaller powers (Yugoslavia, Greece, Bulgaria) all involved in the determination of Albania's fate. The heterogeneous ethnic makeup of the region complicated the situation a good deal, as Naimark ably shows. The key external actor was Yugoslavia, which already was under the rule of Communists led by Josip Broz Tito who were ardent Stalinists. Stalin himself briefly let events proceed on their own, but he quickly decided to reinsert Soviet influence, having become increasingly dissatisfied with Yugoslavia's domineering posture vis-à-vis Albania. Drawing on the work of Leonid Gibianskii, Elidor Mëhilli, and others, as well as his own archival research, Naimark traces the complex twists and turns of this saga very well.<sup>6</sup> Among other things, Naimark offers a nuanced and interesting analysis of the Spiru affair and its aftermath. The supposed suicide of Nako Spiru, a high-ranking Albanian Communist official responsible for economic planning who opposed Yugoslav domination of Albania, has long inspired controversy. Although there is some evidence that Spiru committed suicide (as the official account alleged), there is also considerable evidence that he was murdered by assassins from the Sigurimi state security forces. Naimark rightly leaves open both possibilities.

Naimark's chapter on Finland is a superb account that brings out the complexity of Stalin's policies and goals. Against the backdrop of the Nazi-Soviet alliance in 1939-1941, the Soviet Union had attacked Finland in 1939 and fought a savage war against the Finns in the winter of 1939-1940. After Hitler turned against the Soviet Union in June 1941, Finland again fought against the Red Army in the so-called Continuation War. As the war drew to an end, Stalin considered but decided against incorporating Finland into the USSR as a constituent republic. Stalin did annex the Karelian Isthmus (which had been captured by Soviet forces in the 1939-1940 Winter War and had then been reconquered in 1944-1945) but ultimately decided to leave the rest of Finland as an independent country, albeit one under the long and ominous shadow of Soviet influence.

---

<sup>5</sup> Mikkel Runge Olesen, "To Balance or Not to Balance: How Denmark Almost Stayed out of NATO, 1948-1949," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 20:2 (Spring 2018): 65-98.

<sup>6</sup> L. Ya. Gibianskii, "Proekty federatsii na Balkanakh v gody Vtoroi mirovoi voiny i v nachale kholodnoi voiny," and Aleksandar Životić, "Albaniya i yugoslavskoe videnie Balkanskoi federatsii posle Vtoroi mirovoi voiny," both in R.P. Grishin, K. V. Nikiforov, and Yu. V. Lobachev, eds., *Balkany v evropeiskikh politicheskikh proektakh XIX-XX vv.* (Moscow: Institut Slavyanovedeniya RAN, 2014), pp. 293-330 and 331-360, respectively; L. Ya. Gibianskii, "The Soviet-Yugoslav Conflict and the Soviet Bloc," in Francesca Gori and Silvio Pons, eds., *The Soviet Union and Europe in the Cold War, 1943-53* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996); and Elidor Mëhilli, *From Stalin to Mao: Albania and the Socialist World* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2017).

Naimark's chapter on Italy correctly points out that the main reason the Soviet Union was interested in Italy was the presence of a large and politically influential Communist Party, the *Partito Comunista Italiano* (PCI). As Naimark notes, many of the PCI cadres were eager to make a bid for power right away, but Stalin, working through PCI leader Palmiro Togliatti, put the brakes on that, seeking instead to transform Italy into a pro-Soviet "people's democracy" à la Hungary or Poland. However, that goal was difficult because the U.S. government's interest in Italy was far more salient, and U.S. officials had no intention of allowing Italy to drift toward a Soviet-style regime. Naimark's analysis of Stalin's policy vis-à-vis Italy has benefited a good deal from the pioneering work of Silvio Pons and especially of Elena Aga-Rossi and Victor Zaslavsky.<sup>7</sup> Naimark astutely highlights the wide-ranging efforts by the U.S. government to support the Christian Democrats and other non-Communists in the April 1948 Italian elections both overtly and covertly, but one should note that the funding and other support for non-Communists from Italian-American organizations like the Sons of Italy were even more important, far eclipsing the magnitude of the official U.S. assistance.<sup>8</sup>

As Naimark notes, by 1948 the PCI under Soviet guidance was preparing an uprising to seize power as in Czechoslovakia, but Stalin, after some wavering, ultimately decided against it. This same pattern of Stalin's wavering was evident around the same time in Greece and was also evident two years later when the Austrian Communist Party helped to persuade Stalin to give the go-ahead for a forcible Communist seizure of power. There, too, the Soviet leader ultimately decided against it after initially seeming interested.<sup>9</sup>

Naimark's chapter on the Berlin blockade turns to the country that was at the heart of the Cold War. The highly acclaimed book that Naimark published in the mid-1990s on the Soviet occupation administration in eastern Germany referred only fleetingly to the Berlin blockade, and thus this chapter adds to and enriches rather than duplicates Naimark's earlier work.<sup>10</sup> The chapter insightfully discusses how Stalin had thoroughly misjudged the likely impact of the blockade on the West Berlin population. Naimark traces this misjudgment very well, though I would have liked to know in greater detail about why Stalin misjudged the situation so badly. Which of his advisers misled him?

Early in the chapter, Naimark contends that "Stalin neither placed his forces in the Soviet zone on a war footing nor mobilized additional Red Army troops at home. There were no plans for reinforcing the troops in the Soviet zone" (159). These claims are probably true, but they are based primarily on a source that is not overly reliable.<sup>11</sup> The U.S. intelligence reports from the time tend to corroborate Naimark's claims, but one wishes the relevant Soviet military operational records were accessible.

---

<sup>7</sup> Silvio Pons, "Stalin, Togliatti, and the Origins of the Cold War in Europe," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 3:2 (Spring 2001), 3-27; and Elena Aga-Rossi and Victor Zaslavsky, *Stalin and Togliatti: Italy and the Origins of the Cold War* (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2011).

<sup>8</sup> Stefano Luconi, "Anticommunism, Americanization, and Ethnic Identity: Italian Americans and the 1948 Parliamentary Elections in Italy," *The Historian* 65:2 (Winter 2000), 285-302.

<sup>9</sup> Warren Williams, "Flashpoint Austria: The Communist-Inspired Strikes of 1950," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 9:3 (Summer 2007), 115-136.

<sup>10</sup> Norman M. Naimark, *The Russians in Germany: A History of the Soviet Zone of Occupation, 1945-1949* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995).

<sup>11</sup> Naimark relies on an article by Viktor Gobarev, "Soviet Military Plans and Actions during the First Berlin Crisis, 1948-49," *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 10:3 (September 1997): 1-24. Years ago, after looking at nearly all of the Soviet documents cited in that article, I found that in some cases Gobarev stretches the available evidence much too far.

Assuming that the claims about the lack of Soviet mobilization and reinforcement are true, one thing Naimark does not really clarify is why Stalin seemed to have no fear of U.S. nuclear retaliation. One would have thought, *ceteris paribus*, that Stalin would have been worried about a U.S. nuclear response. After all, the United States enjoyed a monopoly on nuclear weapons throughout this time. Stalin had secretly ordered a crash program in the USSR in August 1945 to produce nuclear arms, but the first Soviet nuclear test did not occur until late August 1949, several months after the blockade of Berlin ended. The United States possessed more than 100 nuclear weapons when the blockade began and nearly 300 by the time it ended.<sup>12</sup> If U.S. heavy bombers capable of carrying nuclear weapons had been deployed to Europe during the crisis, they could have delivered these weapons against the Soviet Union without fear of Soviet retaliation against the United States. This leads to the question of whether Stalin believed there was a genuine threat of a U.S. nuclear attack against the Soviet Union. Stalin would have known that such an attack was *possible*, but did he fear it would actually happen? If not, why was he so confident? Was it because of assurances he was receiving from spies like Kim Philby and Donald Maclean? Surely if the tables had been reversed and the Soviet Union had enjoyed a nuclear monopoly during this period, Stalin would not have hesitated to exploit that monopoly. Did he really think that the United States was less Machiavellian than he was?

One intriguing possibility is that Stalin had found out that no U.S. B-29 heavy bombers equipped to carry nuclear weapons were actually deployed in Europe at any time during the crisis. Naimark is mistaken in saying that U.S. “strategic bombers capable of carrying nuclear weapons had been sent to England to counter a potential attack by bombing Soviet bases” (173). The U.S. Air Force’s official history of the Berlin Blockade, published in 1998, reveals that not a single one of the sixty B-29s sent to Europe during the Berlin crisis was configured to carry nuclear weapons. The only B-29s that were capable of delivering nuclear weapons were based at Roswell AFB in New Mexico, and none of these were sent to Europe until a couple of months after the Berlin Blockade was lifted.<sup>13</sup>

Another question that is not really answered here is why, after the violent incident at the Soviet war memorial near Brandenburg Gate in September 1948, Stalin did not decide to take West Berlin by force. As Naimark himself notes (citing General Lucius Clay), a forcible seizure would not have been difficult (189). Did Stalin seriously consider it at any point? If not, why not? Was he deterred, or was it simply that he did not believe the stakes were high enough to warrant drastic action?

Naimark’s chapter about Poland has a difficult task. Poland’s fate under Soviet occupation has been the subject of an enormous body of literature not only in Poland but in many other countries. The immense amount of scholarship that has appeared over the past quarter century makes it difficult to say anything new about this topic. Even so, Naimark’s chapter is valuable in synthesizing the latest scholarship and in presenting Naimark’s own archival research. On page 199, Naimark cites the published collection of memoir notes of the notorious Soviet state security chief Ivan Serov, which seem to have been based on diaries, but those diaries have not been made available. A few years ago, Serov’s daughter said she would give them to the State Archive of the Russian Federation, but so far she has not followed through on that pledge. That said, I do regard the memoir notes as genuine, and the passage Naimark cites from them is fully in keeping with Serov’s (and Stalin’s) views at the time.

Naimark rightly highlights the many aspects of the Soviet occupation that sparked deep animosity among Poles—the ethnic cleansing, the marauding and rapes committed by Soviet troops, the pillaging, and the clampdowns on non-Communist politicians. Considering that Poland (unlike most of the other countries covered in Naimark’s book) was supposed to be an ally of the Soviet Union, one cannot help but recoil at the horrendous fate of Poland under Soviet occupation. To be sure,

---

<sup>12</sup> Walton S. Moody, *Building a Strategic Air Force* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Air Force History and Museums Program, 1996), 207-209. See also Roger G. Miller, *To Save a City: The Berlin Airlift, 1948-1949* (Bolling AFB D.C.: U.S. Air Force History Support Office, 1998), 25.

<sup>13</sup> Moody, *Building a Strategic Air Force*, 208-209; and Miller, *To Save a City*, 25.

many other scholars have discussed this topic in great depth, but Naimark does an extremely effective job of retelling the story.

Among other issues Naimark highlights is the split in Polish Communist ranks between what the Soviet ambassador in Warsaw, Viktor Lebedev, referred to as the ‘Gomułka group’ and the ‘Minc group.’ According to Lebedev, the nationalist faction led by Władysław Gomułka was increasingly hostile to the faction led by Hilary Minc, who, like several other prominent Polish Communists (Jakub Berman, Roman Zambrowski, etc.) was Jewish. Naimark examines the question of Gomułka’s anti-Semitism. Although some have disputed that Gomułka was anti-Semitic (pointing to the fact that his wife was Jewish), there is a good deal of evidence, including important material presented by Naimark, that in fact Gomułka was always willing to seek political benefit through anti-Semitic insinuations and attacks. Even though Gomułka was not the one who spearheaded Poland’s ugly anti-Semitic campaign twenty years later — that was the doing of Polish Internal Affairs Minister Mieczysław Moczar — Gomułka actively abetted it, giving a speech in March 1968 that is still chilling to watch today.<sup>14</sup>

One point that Naimark might have explored more fully is why the Soviet-inspired purges in Poland, vicious though they were, did not take the same murderous turn they did in Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia. Why would Stalin not have pushed for the Poles who crossed him to be put to death, as he did with officials in these other East European countries? Naimark himself raises this question on pages 228-230 and offers some interesting thoughts, including that Gomułka was not Jewish. That factor was undoubtedly very important at a time when the Soviet Union was enforcing brutal anti-Semitic repressions all through the Soviet bloc, but the large majority of the tens of thousands who were put to death in Bulgaria and Hungary, including high-ranking figures like Bulgarian Communist Party General Secretary Traicho Kostov, Bulgarian Agrarian leader Nikola Petkov, and Hungarian Interior Minister László Rajk, were not Jewish either, yet that did not save them. Stalin was complicit in Kostov’s, Rajk’s, and Petkov’s executions, but he did not push for Gomułka’s execution. More investigation of this topic is still needed to understand why the discrepancy arises.

Naimark’s final chapter, regarding Austria, explores why the four-power occupation of the country became so protracted. A huge body of literature has emerged on this topic over the past 20-25 years, and Naimark draws on it very well. He makes extensive use of published archival collections (including one in which he was involved) as well as recently declassified materials stored in Moscow and Vienna repositories.<sup>15</sup> Even though the Austrian interregnum of 1945-1955 has been examined and reexamined in great detail by now, Naimark provides a fresh and lively account, including with some humorous asides (for example, about President Karl Renner’s unwitting praise of Leon Trotsky in a letter to Stalin). Naimark recounts how the atrocities committed by Soviet occupying forces and the ineptitude of the Austrian Communist Party prevented the Soviet Union from gaining any real foothold in Austria, despite Stalin’s initial grandiose hopes.

---

<sup>14</sup> A video of the speech, delivered on 19 March 1968 to Warsaw party activists, can be found online at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=118&v=4ZeoCvLB1Tw&feature=emb\\_logo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=118&v=4ZeoCvLB1Tw&feature=emb_logo). In the speech, Gomułka branded Jews as a sinister “fifth column” and vowed “never to permit a fifth column in Poland.” For a perceptive analysis of the anti-Semitic campaign in Poland, see Dariusz Stola, *Kampania antysyjonistyczna w Polsce 1967-1968* (Warsaw: Instytut Studiów Politycznych PAN, 2000).

<sup>15</sup> Stefan Karner and Barbara Stelzl-Marx, eds., *Die Rote Armee in Österreich: Sowjetische Besatzung 1945–1955*. (Graz: Ludwig Boltzmann-Institut für Kriegsfolgen-Forschung, 2005); Wolfgang Mueller et al., eds., *Sowjetische Politik in Österreich 1945-1955: Dokumente aus russischen Archiven* (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2005); and Arnold Suppan, Gerald Stourzh, and Wolfgang Mueller, eds., *Der österreichische Staatsvertrag 1955: Internationale Strategie, rechtliche Relevanz, nationale Identität* (Vienna: Böhlau, 2006), 121-1433. The definitive analysis of the 1945-1955 period in Soviet-Austrian relations is Gerald Stourzh and Wolfgang Mueller, *A Cold War over Austria: The Struggle for the State Treaty, Neutrality, and the End of East–West Occupation, 1945–1955* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2018). See also Wolfgang Mueller, *Die sowjetische Besatzung in Österreich 1945-1955 und ihre politische Mission* (Vienna: Böhlau, 2005); and Guenter Bischof, *Austria in the First Cold War, 1945-55* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999).



Overall, the chapter is excellent, but Naimark should have linked Soviet policy on the Austrian state treaty negotiations more closely to Soviet policy vis-à-vis Germany. Even though Stalin in 1945 did not see these two issues as being intimately linked, the bifurcation of Germany and the intermittent deadlocks in the Austrian treaty negotiations caused the Soviet leader increasingly to see Austria as a potential model for the type of settlement he wanted to impose in Germany. The links were evident by 1948-1949 and became all the more salient in the early 1950s. Not until after Stalin's death in 1953 did the situation begin to change, leading in a relatively short time to breakthroughs on Austria and the signing of the Austrian State Treaty even as the division of Germany solidified. Naimark, who alludes to these developments toward the end of the chapter, writes: "We still have no clear understanding of why Stalin allowed the Austrian situation to stagnate after the initiatives of 1948-1949 came to naught" (261). But if we take account of the links with the stalled talks over Germany, Soviet policy on the matter becomes much easier to understand, at least while Stalin was alive.

Given the time parameters of Naimark's book, the Austria chapter stops at the beginning of 1950 apart from a few brief comments about how the Austrian State Treaty was achieved after Stalin's death. One wishes that the chapter had included a section about the Communist-instigated strikes in September 1950 (it could have been added on page 268). The Communists, with their usual detachment from reality, were hoping they could use the strikes as the prelude to a seizure of power in Austria.<sup>16</sup> But Stalin, unlike the Austrian Communists, understood that the chances of success were nil, and he declined to lend his backing. Naimark does not discuss this episode, but if he had, it would have illuminated some of his other cases, including Finland, Italy, and Berlin.

The concluding chapter of Naimark's book contains a paragraph that adroitly sums up the book's themes:

This book has shown that these events and those that led up to them cannot be understood only in the context of the Cold War between the Soviet Union and the United States. This was, above all, European history in the sense that the intentions of European political leaders and the results of European elections were of vital importance in determining the outcome of crises and conflicts within European societies regarding their future. The agency of Europeans mattered, and mattered a lot. The political inclinations of postwar leaders and the bitter experience of the Nazi domination of Europe influenced their choices and guided their actions when faced with pressure and enticements from the Soviets and Americans alike. To be sure, Soviet pressure was sometimes overwhelming and deprived Europeans of complete sovereignty in their choices of political futures. But the struggle was real, and there was little that was inevitable about the division of the continent in the immediate postwar period (272).

*Stalin and the Fate of Europe* will not settle all questions and debates, but it is an excellent analysis of a topic that lies at the origins of the Cold War. The book will be of great interest to any readers who want a better understanding of the political and social dynamics of postwar Europe, Stalin's foreign policy, international relations, and the origins of the Cold War.

---

<sup>16</sup> Williams, "Flashpoint Austria," 111-136.

---

REVIEW BY ELIDOR MËHILLI, HUNTER COLLEGE OF THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

---

Norman Naimark's *Stalin and the Fate of Europe* can be read a number of ways. Here are five ways I read it, in the hope that they show how the book speaks to different audiences. It synthesizes findings from a vital field within international history, develops a commentary on Joseph Stalin's power vis-à-vis a broader range of political actors, draws a distinctly European picture, and offers insights for how we can think about the postwar period.

*The book as a geographic challenge to how we frame narratives of postwar Europe.*

*Stalin and the Fate of Europe* consists of seven case studies, ranging from the Danish island of Bornholm and the Soviet involvement in Finland to internal conflicts in Albania, Italy, Germany, Poland, and Austria. In some of these places, Soviet troops were on the ground and the question becomes why they left when they did. In others, Moscow was a distant but nevertheless powerful reference. Such diversity of conditions and outcomes is important because it demonstrates the limits of viewing Soviet power in Europe after the Second World War as a purely external imposition.

Any case selection is bound to leave some reviewer unhappy (why Denmark but not Hungary? Why not more of Prague?) but I think this misses the point. Good accounts of Soviet involvement in the larger Eastern European countries are available, and it is hard to argue that Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia have been neglected. In fact, it is precisely this geographically broader case selection that makes Naimark's study seem panoramic and refreshing. Cold War scholars will be familiar with the Berlin blockade, but less so, perhaps, with the intricacies of the important Albanian-Yugoslav-Greek dynamics of the late 1940s, which are brilliantly captured in the second chapter. Those not particularly fixated on the Cold War itself still find plenty to engage with: the pains of reconstruction; chaotic elections featuring high voter turnout and foreign interference; clashing visions of Europe.

The geography of Naimark's narrative also serves as a reminder—even before China and Korea are added to standard Cold War narratives—of the scope of the strategic challenge faced by Moscow. It is not that all of these places were somehow equally important, as the author makes clear. It is that the process of prioritizing them was not somehow self-evident, and neither can historians retroactively assume such hierarchy. Studying national examples in parallel offers the benefit of getting deep dives. At the same time, there is risk of losing sight of linkages. Hence, some repetition is unavoidable as it helps to underscore central elements: not only the Marshall Plan, but also of the regional tangle of the Greek Civil War and how the 1948 Communist coup in Czechoslovakia affected the elections in Italy.

*The book as a study of Stalin's motives.*

Readers familiar with Naimark's scholarship will recognize the book's central argument that there was no predefined master plan to turn large chunks of European territory Soviet. In his acclaimed *The Russians in Germany*, he argued that the Soviets Bolshevized parts of Germany "not because there was a plan to do so, but because that was the only way they knew how to organize society." They brought their "commonly shared historical experiences and social instincts that influenced the development of occupation policy," he explained then, "as much if not more than articulated principles of ideology."<sup>1</sup> The habitual aspect of the Soviet encounter remains a useful insight for Cold War scholarship, highlighting the need to study power as something more than top-down political schemes. So how did it work out exactly? It depends.

Rather than assuming a single prevailing explanation for Stalin's actions, Naimark takes a case-by-case approach, showing how changing geopolitical imperatives interacted with reasoning in Moscow—often in ways that seem surprising in retrospect. He usefully distinguishes between short-term tactics and longer-term goals, including a broader ideological

---

<sup>1</sup> Norman Naimark, *The Russians in Germany: A History of the Soviet Zone of Occupation, 1945–1949* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1995), 467.

outlook of the future world to come. This latter vision took hit after hit in the postwar era. Still, the idea that the road to Communism required some ideological flexibility long preceded Stalin's quandaries in the 1940s.

Do we expect dictators to have been unfailingly consistent in their practice of power? In Naimark's telling, Stalin did not feel such constraints. He said different things to different people at different times (16). His interlocutors were sometimes befuddled by his pronouncements. (I would add that anyone scrutinizing Chairman Mao Zedong's statements to China's fellow-travellers in the 1960s will appreciate the value of mixed messages, or how productive uncertainty could end up being down the line.) The handling of Bornholm showed a degree of flexibility in Moscow, as was the case with Finland. However, Stalin's dealings with Yugoslav leader Josip Broz Tito and Albanian party chief Enver Hoxha in the second half of the 1940s highlight not the mere fact of the Soviet boss' zigzagging, but the dreadful political stakes in trying not to fall on the wrong side of it.

Handling contradictions is also what historians of authoritarian regimes do. Going through the available evidence on Stalin's thinking on any particular issue, Naimark offers a model for not flattening explanations. There are sources that can be interpreted any number of ways, and he says so (16-17). There are moments that remain obscure. At times, he weighs both sides of a question, before going along with one or the other and explaining why. It is a historical operation that probes deeply but does not conceal the challenge of interpretation. The benefit is that we do not obtain a rigid political history of powerful actors who act and things fall into place.

Stalin appears powerful but fallible. He entertained national stereotypes about Finns, Albanians, and Poles. He misread dynamics abroad. He took gambles.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, the international situation also proved relentless. Enforcing discipline on Greece hardly got him a good result in the Balkans, whereas bumping up the pressure in Berlin had the unintended consequence of "the demonstration of political will among the Berliners in the western sectors" (192). Indeed, the existence of a West Berlin became an enduring symbol, saddling Stalin's less tyrannical successors for decades to come. So one way to look at Stalin's power is to see it projected against international dynamics both big and small.

Another is to pay attention to those who had to deal with him, who grew frustrated by the fact that he sometimes ignored them, or who had the misfortune of not being ignored by him. In the daunting shadow of the *vozhd'* other egos grew—at times surprisingly large egos relative to the size of the political parties or the countries they led. They too had to learn the nature of Stalin's power through trial and error. Occasionally, Soviet officials pushed Communist parties in Europe to be more militant, then promptly criticized them for being too militant and for missing the bigger picture. This dynamic created, as Naimark puts it, "an infantile dependence" on Moscow (107). I wonder, however, how much this development was a 1940s story, or even a Stalin-era story. Did it outlive him, indicating something structural? His successors invariably struggled with the dependency trap in Eastern Europe.

*The book as a study of sovereignty.*

Naimark follows a number of European leaders who, he argues, sought to preserve national sovereignty in the face of foreign pressures. They are of various political stripes, including Communist party leaders in Albania, Italy, and Poland, socialists in Berlin and Vienna, Christian Democrats like Alcide De Gasperi, and Finnish presidents Carl Gustaf Emil Mannerheim and Juho Kusti Paasikivi. The latter strove to master a delicate balancing act with Moscow. We learn how important it was not merely to keep watch over one's enemies (no small feat) but also how to keep one's friends at the right distance.

The biographic element also shows how limiting it can be, when studying this period, to see sovereignty as equivalent to an anti-Soviet proposition. That it surely was for many of these politicians. Yet for some, sovereignty could mean aligning with Stalin's objectives. For others it meant learning to balance the conflicting agendas of foreign powers while facing the risk of

---

<sup>2</sup> "He was a gambler, but also a vacillator." Stephen Kotkin, *Stalin: Waiting for Hitler, 1929-1941* (New York: Penguin, 2017), 675.

one's country torn apart by civil strife. In the shades of gray in these stories, the local stakes assume a fuller clarity, as does the importance of political skill and tactical talent (notably but not exclusively in Italy and Finland.)

Sovereignty was an everyday problem for many Europeans, well before decolonization fundamentally challenged the continent's remaining empires. There are important stories in these tugs over sovereignty in smaller places around the continent—if we only look at them. There can be lessons, for example, in contingency. As Naimark judiciously demonstrates, achieving compromise was easier in places where Stalin's interests were less direct. This kind of geopolitical nuance gets lost in the making of national and historiographical myths, which gets me to the next way of reading this book.

*The book as an entry point into how national patriots are made.*

*Stalin and the Fate of Europe* invites thinking about how dealing with Stalin could also serve local political needs. This, too, is a story that cuts across national and ideological lines. Some of the self-declared patriots readily threw their lot with the Soviets, while others welcomed U.S. cash infusions and CIA-designed psychological warfare to fight their Communist opponents. The discussion of Polish leader Władysław Gomułka's attitudes to the role of Jews within the Polish leadership (213-230) is critical. It shows that resistance to Moscow and surviving Stalin could help build patriotic credentials, but it could also underplay hideous domestic politics. By the end of the book, Naimark's analysis touches on how memory politics intervenes in the making of these national figures. It is a local process reflecting local needs. But *Stalin and the Fate of Europe* also gestures to how the international order shapes what is possible.

*The book as a reflection on open-endedness leading to the watershed years 1948-1949.*

It is possible to research (and teach) the second half of the 1940s without subsuming the whole period under the rubric of the 'Origins of The Cold War.' Political pluralism did not survive in many places. Indeed, Naimark writes that "it was something of a miracle that democratic, pluralist politics could develop at all" (267). But the shape and firmness of politics took some time to develop around the continent. In this regard, it can be fruitful to read Naimark's deeply researched study in conversation with other contributions on postwar reconstruction and the global resonance of 1948.<sup>3</sup> There is benefit in globalizing this period, but *Stalin and the Fate of Europe* makes clear that there was richness and diversity to the European story. Finally, the book's sixty-two pages of footnotes stand as a good reminder that postwar European and Cold War scholarship has not grown exclusively within the English language. Masterfully mining archival sources in multiple languages like few scholars can, Naimark cites across national historiographies, putting on display the vitality of work carried out outside of the Anglophone sphere. It takes formidable talent to make this look easy. The breadth of this book reminds me of the incredible range of the scholarship produced by the students he has trained over decades—a testament to a lifelong dedication.

---

<sup>3</sup> Mark Mazower, "The End of Eurocentrism," *Critical Inquiry* 40:4 (Around 1948: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Global Transformation, edited by Leela Gandhi and Deborah L. Nelson) (Summer 2014): 298-313. On 1940s reconstruction as an interpretative challenge, see contributions in Mark Mazower, Jessica Reinisch and David Feldman, eds., *Post-war Reconstruction in Europe: International Perspectives, 1945-1949* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

REVIEW BY MARC TRACHTENBERG, UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, LOS ANGELES

---

Norman Naimark is one of America's most distinguished historians. Everything he writes is worth reading, and his new book, *Stalin and the Fate of Europe: The Postwar Struggle for Sovereignty*, is no exception. Many scholars, of course, have dealt with the political history of Europe in the late 1940s, and Soviet foreign policy during that period has been a particular focus of interest. But Naimark is not just going over familiar ground here. His approach to this general problem is, in fact, quite unusual.

He is reacting in this book to what he calls "the well-honed dark images and paradigms of traditional Cold War history" (18)—to the idea that the division of Europe was more or less inevitable, in large part because the Soviet leader, Joseph Stalin, was determined from the start to impose Communist regimes on the areas his armies occupied at the end of the war. Stalin was famously quoted as declaring in April 1945 that "whoever occupies a territory also imposes on it his own social system," but, as Naimark points out, the Soviets occupied parts of Denmark, Finland, and Austria without imposing their system on those territories. It is thus clear that what happened, even in the areas controlled by the Red Army in 1945, depended in large measure on circumstances specific to those particular areas. And what that means is that one can get some insight into Soviet policy in general by looking closely at a number of those particular cases, and indeed also at a number of other cases where Soviet forces were not present.

So the book takes the form of a series of seven case studies, each dealing with how events took their course in a specific part of Europe during a particular period. The first chapter, for example, deals with a small Danish island in the Baltic, Bornholm, which the Soviets occupied for a brief period after the war. Other chapters deal with Albania, Finland, Austria, and Poland; there are also chapters on the Italian elections of 1948 and on the Berlin Blockade affair of 1948-49. The stories are always interesting. They are sometimes fascinating. But Naimark is telling these stories mainly because he has some larger points to make. He is concerned ultimately with how postwar European politics is to be understood—with why things worked out the way they did, and why things turned out so differently in different places.

And, when viewed as a whole, the case studies, he thinks, allow us to draw certain important conclusions about that general issue. Taken together, he writes, the case studies "point to the diversity and complexity of Stalin's aims on the continent" (24). They show how fluid the situation in Europe was in the postwar period; they show how important local politics, local leadership, and local circumstances were in shaping the larger picture. One should not, in his view, overestimate the importance of the Cold War and the policies of the great powers in determining the course of events. Looking back in the conclusion on what the book has been about, he writes that "this was, above all, European history, in the sense that the intentions of European political leaders and the results of European elections were of vital importance in determining the outcome of crises and conflicts within European societies regarding their future. The agency of Europeans mattered and mattered a lot" (272).

And because all sorts of factors came into play in a major way, no one at the time could tell for sure how things would run their course. The case studies, he writes, point "to the openness of outcomes and alternative trajectories, recognizing that the Soviet Union increasingly—and brutally—shut down possibilities of genuinely democratic politics in eastern Europe while seeking to increase its leverage over communist parties and the broader societies they sought to influence in the West" (24). But that outcome was not in the cards from the outset; it was the product of an historical process which could conceivably have developed all kinds of different ways. Naimark thus takes issue with what he sees as "the general historiographical portrait of a continent divided from the end of the war, with the predetermined outcome of the Cold War." The picture, he writes, is "much more blurred and uncertain when looked at from the perspective of the immediate postwar history of Europe" (24).

That general picture is based, in large measure, on a particular interpretation of Soviet policy in this period. Stalin, he writes, "had no firm plan for postwar Europe, nor even what we would call today a road map for the development of a socialist continent" (11). His idea "was for Europe's communist parties to ally with socialist and other anti-fascist parties, including those of the 'center,' to complete the bourgeois revolution and begin the long process—sometimes articulated as twenty-five

to thirty years—of a gradual transition to socialism” (14). Stalin was “not interested in fomenting socialist revolutions in Europe” (11; see also 270). He looked instead to the establishment of “new democracies” or “people’s democracies” as the “best way to model the new political systems emerging from the war.” “There would,” in that model, “be no dictatorship of the proletariat, no collectivization, no socialization of property” (268-69).

To be sure, Stalin had certain geostrategic goals “in the narrowest sense of the term” (13). He sought to exercise influence “in all of Europe but above all in the bordering lands of eastern Europe” (13). “At a minimum,” Naimark writes, Stalin wanted “a sphere of influence in eastern Europe and direct influence on the future development of Germany and Austria” (13). But this did not mean that he was happy to live with a divided Europe. Indeed, according to Naimark, “one of Stalin’s overriding priorities was that Europe *not* be divided into strict eastern and western zones of influence” (14). Stalin’s policies toward Germany and Austria are important cases in point. In those two cases, those policies “demanded that the unity of these countries be preserved, even when the Western Allies had decided that division was the most advantageous way for them to deal with the ‘German question,’ if not that of Austria” (14).

What are we to make of all this? What, in particular, are we to take away from the case studies? Do they actually support that general view of Soviet policy in the postwar period? My own view is mixed. The case studies in themselves, to my mind, are very much worth reading. Even small brushstrokes in a larger picture can be quite revealing, and this is often the case here. Naimark’s argument about the importance of local actors and local circumstances in all of these cases I found quite convincing and important. It is a good antidote to the tendency some of us have to focus, perhaps too heavily, on the policies of the major powers.

I also felt that the stories themselves were on occasion just fascinating. I have in mind, in particular, Naimark’s account of the Polish case in the “Gomulka versus Stalin” chapter, and especially the discussion there of the role the Jewish question played in Polish Communist politics at this time. I was particularly struck by the following passage:

Compared to the other communist leaders, [Polish Communist Party chief Wladyslaw] Gomulka enjoyed at least a modicum of popularity in the country. He was also known in government and party circles for his opposition to the return of the several hundred thousand Polish Jews who had managed to escape or were deported from occupied Poland to the Soviet Union during the war, as well as for his advocacy—along with many other [Polish Workers’ Party] PPR leaders—of their immediate emigration once they had returned. Gomulka was an outspoken proponent of a mono-ethnic Poland—Germans, Ukrainians, and Jews should all leave—a vision that was popular both within the party and among the general population (218).

Naimark’s basic tendency is to sympathize with local leaders and the people who supported them in their ‘struggle for sovereignty,’ and at the end of this chapter he seems to praise Gomulka for managing to “lead a political struggle within the Communist Party for the integrity of the Polish road to socialism, even after the program no longer conformed to Moscow’s interests” (230). But the whole story of Gomulka and the Jewish question throws a somewhat different light on that issue; the real story is more complex, even in moral terms, than one might have thought.

The Italian case is also of considerable interest. Stalin in 1943 “opposed any attempt by the Italian communists to strike for power” (123). In 1944, after meeting with Stalin, the Italian Communist leader Palmiro Togliatti returned to Italy and “pronounced his famous *La svolta di Salerno* (the Salerno turn), which set out the surprising communist policy for years to come: cooperation with the bourgeois government (which meant, at that moment, with the Badoglio government) in the name of promoting democracy and defeating fascism and its remnants at home and on the continent” (123-24). But although Stalin’s directives were “followed scrupulously,” the Soviet leader became “increasingly unhappy with the results of the parliamentary strategies” the Italian Communists pursued, and in late 1947 the Soviet line hardened. Now Moscow’s message was that the Italian Communist Party (PCI) “did not have a sufficiently aggressive attitude.” That criticism encouraged the more radical elements in the party to take to the streets, and there were “temporary seizures of towns” and “hundreds of bomb-throwing incidents and impromptu strikes” (131-33). But Stalin, who was now worried about where all this might lead, shifted course and again insisted on a more moderate line (133). One has the sense that Togliatti must have

felt that Stalin had been jerking the Italian party around and that this might well have encouraged him to take a more independent line—a kind of Eurocommunism *avant la lettre*. “Although remaining loyal to Stalin and the Cominform,” Naimark writes, “Togliatti gradually, if perceptibly, developed his own strategy for preserving the PCI’s role in Italian politics and society” (148)—and it is hard to believe that the way he had been treated by Stalin did not have a good deal to do with the emergence of that kind of strategy.

So the case studies are of real interest in their own right, but taken as a whole do they really show that the general situation was a good deal more fluid than we have led to believe, in large part because Stalin was not intent on imposing Communist regimes on the areas the Red Army occupied but instead “looked to the establishment of ‘new democracies’ or ‘people’s democracies,’ which he saw as an attractive intermediate stage between bourgeois democracy and socialism, as the best way to model the new political systems emerging from the war” (268)? On the one hand, the Austrian, Finnish, and Danish cases do show that Soviet-style regimes were not automatically imposed on areas where Soviet forces were present. But, even in those cases, it is hard to see how a policy of encouraging the establishment of ‘new democracies’ had much to do with what happened in those areas. In the Finnish elections of March 1945, the local Communist parties and their allies had only limited success (107); in the Austrian elections of November 1945 the Communists suffered “an unexpected and catastrophic defeat” (240). In such circumstances, the ‘new democracy’ strategy could scarcely be put into effect, and ordinary geopolitical considerations seem to have played a key role in shaping Soviet policy in all three of those cases. The ‘new democracies’ policy obviously had very little effect in the Albanian case; the Red Army was not even present in that country. As for Italy, one can make a case that the moderate line Stalin took in the immediate postwar period was to be understood in terms of that basic ‘new democracies’ strategy, but it can equally well be explained in terms of Stalin’s acceptance of Italy as lying within the Anglo-American sphere of influence.<sup>1</sup> It is, moreover, important to remember that Soviet forces were not present in that country, so this particular case does not relate directly to the question of whether the USSR sought as a rule to impose Communist regimes in the countries the Red Army occupied. In any event, the hard line Stalin took beginning in September 1947 had the effect, as Naimark shows, of making a policy of cooperation with the non-Communist parties virtually impossible. But by that point, he would probably argue, the developing Cold War had put an end to the period of ‘fluidity.’

Of all the cases considered here, only the East German and Polish cases provide a real test of the theory that ‘new democracies’ thinking played a key role in shaping Soviet policy in areas the Red Army occupied at the end of the war, at least in the immediate postwar period. With regard to Germany, Naimark thinks there is only “scattered evidence” that the Soviets intended from the start to create a puppet state in the part of that country they controlled (162). It was more likely, he thinks, that Stalin “at least for the first two or three years after the war, and even thereafter,” was “averse to the idea of dividing Germany between east and west.” From his point of view, a weak but united Germany was “much preferable” (162). The Soviet leader, he says, “was not all that interested in the institutionalization of Soviet-style ‘socialism’ in Germany. As elsewhere on the continent, he envisioned forming a progressive ‘national front’ and a potential ‘new democracy,’ a planned transition stage between bourgeois democracy and socialism” (163).

This is an important argument, and I cannot analyze it at length here, but let me make just three points. First of all, I do not think it is correct to say that there is only “scattered evidence” that the Soviets, from the start, were interested in holding on to eastern Germany. What Naimark has in mind by that phrase, I think, are things like Stalin’s observation, in a June 1945 meeting with the German Communist leaders, that there were going to be “two Germanies,” and the German Communist leader Walter Ulbricht’s famous remark a month earlier that while “it’s got to look democratic,” the Communists needed to

---

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Silvio Pons, “Stalin, Togliatti, and the Origins of the Cold War in Europe,” *Journal of Cold War Studies* 3:2 (Spring 2001). Other writers have made similar arguments. According to Richard Drake’s review of Elena Aga-Rossi’s and Victor Zaslavsky’s book *Stalin and Togliatti: Italy and the Origins of the Cold War* (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2011), those two authors contended in an earlier unpublished paper that Stalin had decided in 1944 to have the Italian Communist Party “cooperate with the other anti-Fascist parties in a government of national unity” because he “thought of Italy at this time strictly as a bargaining chip, to be sacrificed to the West for bigger prizes in Eastern Europe.” Drake’s review appeared in the *Journal of Cold War Studies* 14:3 (Summer 2012): 203-206.

“have everything under our control.”<sup>2</sup> But isolated remarks of that sort are not the only kind of evidence we have to go on. We can also learn a good deal by looking at what the Soviets were doing on the ground in their part of Germany—namely, building a police state. As Naimark pointed out in his book *The Russians in Germany*, the sort of police structure the Soviets and the German Communists were building in eastern Germany is very much worth noting; the fact that they were building that sort of structure, he wrote, “corroborates the argument that plans were in the making for the permanent Sovietization of the zone.”<sup>3</sup> The diplomatic sources also shed a good deal of light on this issue. The Potsdam Conference documents are of fundamental importance in this regard.<sup>4</sup> But the material from the post-Potsdam period in late 1945 is also quite illuminating.<sup>5</sup>

The second point is that this issue of what Stalin’s goals for Germany were is not really treated at great length in this book. The chapter on Germany deals mainly with the Berlin Blockade affair of 1948-49; only three pages are devoted to the question of Stalin’s goals in the 1945-47 period. Naimark, of course, is an expert in this area, and his views on the subject deserve to be taken very seriously, but the chapter on Germany here does not in itself contain the kind of evidence that might persuade people that Stalin, in the immediate postwar period, was really pursuing the kind of policy Naimark says he was pursuing—at least people who did not already share his basic views on the subject.

The third point is that Naimark, in the introduction to the book, actually seems to concede the basic point here. He raises the question of “how genuine Stalin’s commitment was” to the “new democracy model,” and points out that some scholars think this kind of rhetoric was just for show. He then comments that:

The evidence cuts both ways, depending both on the time and place Stalin indicated what he would like done and the chronology of his growing disgruntlement with the West. In some cases,

---

<sup>2</sup> For the “two Germanies” remark, see the notes of Stalin’s meeting with German Communist leaders, 4 June 1945, first published in Manfred Wilke, “‘Es wird zwei Deutschlands geben’: Entscheidung über die Zusammensetzung der Kader,” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 30 March 1991, p. 6, and also published in Rolf Badstübner and Wilfried Loth, eds., *Wilhelm Pieck: Aufzeichnungen zur Deutschlandpolitik 1945–1953* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1994), 50–52. For the Ulbricht quotation, see Wolfgang Leonhard, *Child of the Revolution* (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1958), 303.

<sup>3</sup> Norman Naimark, *The Russians in Germany: A History of the Soviet Zone of Occupation, 1945-1949* (Cambridge MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1995), 354-55. I should also note that one of Naimark’s main points in the new book is somewhat at odds with a key argument he had made in the earlier volume about Stalin’s goals in Germany (or lack thereof). “Soviet officers bolshevized the zone,” he wrote in *The Russians in Germany* (467), “not because there was a plan to do so, but because that was the only way they knew to organize society.” But the fact that Communist regimes were not imposed on other areas they occupied—a key point in the new book—shows that bolshevization was not automatic, or driven by “force of habit” on the part of officials and military officers on the ground (*Russians in Germany*, 284, 352); it suggests instead that what happened was rather the product of decisions made at a much higher political level.

<sup>4</sup> The U.S. records are quite extraordinary: United States Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States: The Conference of Berlin (The Potsdam Conference) 1945* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1960), vol. 2. This is, to my mind, the most revealing collection of documents in the whole *Foreign Relations of the United States* series. The published British and Soviet records are also very much worth reading: *Documents on British Policy Overseas* [DBPO], ed. Rohan Butler and M. E. Pelly, Series I, vol. 1, *The Conference at Potsdam, July–August 1945* (London: HMSO, 1984); and Robert Beitzell, ed., *Tehran Yalta Potsdam: The Soviet Protocols* (Hattiesburg, Miss.: Academic International, 1970).

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, G.D.A. MacDougall, “Some Random Notes on the Reparation Discussions in Berlin, September-November 1945,” DBPO series I, vol. 5, esp. 527, 529. If the Soviets had wanted to avoid a division of Germany, they would have had to work with the western allies in running Germany on a quadripartite basis, at least for the time being. That meant in particular that the four occupying powers would have to work out arrangements defining the level at which the German economy would operate, something which was required in any event by the reparation provisions of the Potsdam Protocol. But, as the MacDougall document shows, the Soviets made it quite clear that they did not take the ‘level of industry’ negotiations seriously at all.



he seemed determined to seize power one way or another, using the “new democracy” as a smoke screen. He upbraided the East German communists for being excessively “Teutonic” about achieving their socialist goals; instead they needed to learn to “mask” their aims. Walter Ulbricht, the East German communist leader, took Stalin’s message to heart when he told a group of party activists that their policies and actions “should look democratic but we must keep everything in our hands.” But there were other times, especially when Stalin was dealing with the Italian or Austrian communists, or even the Polish comrades in the immediate postwar period, that the “boss” indicated a genuine commitment to the idea of “new democracy” (16).

For Naimark, then, the East German case is thus actually an example of Stalin using ‘new democracy’ rhetoric as a ‘smoke screen,’ and Ulbricht’s well-known comment about how things just had to ‘look democratic’ is treated as representing the real Stalin policy.

So we are left with the Polish case. Does Naimark’s analysis here show that Stalin was genuinely committed “to the idea of ‘new democracy’” in the immediate postwar period? The Soviets, he writes, told the Polish Communists “to drop their revolutionary rhetoric and seek broad coalitions with left and bourgeois parties to stimulate the formation of anti-fascist ‘people’s democracies’” (209). Stalin himself, he points out, told a delegation from the Polish party in May 1946 that “in Poland there is no dictatorship of the proletariat, and there is no need for it” (205). But the Soviet leader, as Naimark has noted elsewhere, was a “consummate dissimulator,” and one should not simply assume that those words are to be taken at face value.<sup>6</sup> So in order to determine whether Stalin was genuinely committed to the idea of an honest alliance “with socialist and other ‘anti-fascist’ parties” (14) one has to look at what was actually being done in the country at the time. And, as Naimark points out, a “new order” was “being imposed on Poland” through police state methods (199). He also notes that “neither Gomulka nor Stalin had a pluralist country in mind” (205). It is, in fact, clear from other sources that the Communists were determined to dominate the country and that non-Communist parties would be tolerated only if they accepted the “hegemony” of the Communist Party.<sup>7</sup>

The whole question of whether there was any chance to create a political system based on a “broad coalition” of all the anti-fascist parties is not, in any event, the real focus of the chapter. As its title indicates, the great bulk of this chapter is not about whether a Communist police state would be imposed on Poland. It is about the struggle between Gomulka and Stalin over the question of how much autonomy the Polish party would have—a struggle that continued well after it had become abundantly clear that real power in the country would remain in Communist hands, and a struggle which Stalin (as Naimark notes on 230) was more or less bound to win. So the Polish case does not really point “to the openness of outcomes and alternative trajectories.” Naimark, in fact, feels that “that Poland was in some senses doomed to fall under Soviet hegemony and communist rule given its crucial geostrategic location in Europe.”<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> H-Diplo roundtable on Marc Trachtenberg, “The United States and Eastern Europe in 1945: A Reassessment,” May 2009, 41 (<http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/polisci/faculty/trachtenberg/cv/USEERT.pdf>). The original article was published in the *Journal of Cold War Studies* 10:4 (Fall 2008).

<sup>7</sup> See Antony Polonsky and Boleslaw Drukier, *The Beginnings of Communist Rule in Poland* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980), 49, 126; John Coutouvidis and Jaime Reynolds, *Poland 1939–1947* (Leicester, UK: Leicester University Press, 1986), 196, 201–202; Krystyna Kersten, *The Establishment of Communist Rule in Poland, 1943–1948* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 193; Andrzej Paczkowski, *The Spring Will Be Ours: Poland and the Poles from Occupation to Freedom* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003), 144; and Leonid Gibianskii [Gibianskij], “Osteuropa: Sicherheitszone der UdSSR, sowjetisiertes Protektorat des Kreml oder Sozialismus ‘ohne Diktatur des Proletariats’?” *Forum für osteuropäische Ideen- und Zeitgeschichte* 8:2 (2004), esp. 125–126, and the sources cited there.

<sup>8</sup> Quoted in Melissa De Witte, “Stalin did not want an Iron Curtain to descend, Stanford historian says,” *Stanford News Service*, December 26, 2019 (<https://news.stanford.edu/2019/12/26/stalin-not-want-iron-curtain-descend/>).

It is thus hard to take all the rhetoric about ‘new democracies’ and ‘people’s democracies’ at face value, or to interpret it as anything more than a tactic designed to minimize both internal and external opposition to what the USSR was doing in many of the areas the USSR controlled at the end of the war. That, in any event, is the view a number of leading scholars have come to hold. The work of Russian historian Leonid Gibianskii is an important case in point. For Gibianskii, as Naimark pointed out in a 2004 article, “People’s Democracy was a sham, camouflage, a cover for Stalin and his comrades to deceive the West and hornswoggle non-Communist politicians in Eastern Europe, including social democrats and agrarian party leaders.”<sup>9</sup> And that view is supported by a good deal of evidence. In a September 1946 meeting with the well-known Bulgarian Communist Georgi Dimitrov, Stalin, for example, referred to a broadly based “*people’s party*” as “a *convenient mask* for the present period”; “later there will be time,” he said, “for the *maximal program*.”<sup>10</sup>

None of this means, of course, that Soviet occupation led to Communization in a more or less automatic way. The cases of Austria, Finland, and Bornholm, as Naimark reminds us, show that this was not at all the case. And even elsewhere it is clear that the pace and nature of the process depended both on local conditions and on the developing geopolitical context. Those points are important, but they do not in themselves mean that the Soviet government was not determined, relatively early on, to impose Communist regimes on strategically crucial areas like eastern Germany and Poland.

And I wonder if Naimark would at least half-agree that in some respects traditional views were not all that off-base—that when it came to countries like Poland, “the well-honed dark images and paradigms of traditional Cold War history” really did capture what was actually going on. His remark about how that country was in some sense “doomed to fall under Soviet hegemony and communist rule” certainly points in that direction. And the fact that he thinks that Stalin’s real thinking was reflected in Ulbricht’s remark about how things just had to ‘look democratic’ also supports that view.

More than twenty years ago Naimark and Gibianskii referred, in their introduction to a volume they edited on the subject, to the traditional interpretation, as reflected in the writings of scholars like Hugh Seton-Watson and Zbigniew Brzezinski, that the “Communist ‘takeover’ in Eastern Europe was ultimately designed and executed by Moscow for the purpose of extending its sphere of influence in Europe and the world.” Although they felt that other important issues needed to be studied, the more recent scholarship to their mind essentially confirmed what those writers had argued many years earlier. “There can be few doubts,” they wrote, “that the combination of the presence of the Soviet army, the intrigues of the Soviet secret police, the designs of the Soviet Central Committee, and the instructions of Soviet Ministries played *the* central role in the construction of socialist governments in the region. Brzezinski and Seton-Watson had it right the first time.”<sup>11</sup> After

---

<sup>9</sup> Norman Naimark, “Post-Soviet Russian Historiography on the Emergence of the Soviet Bloc,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* (new series) 5:3 (Summer 2004), 569. Another Gibianskii comment to that effect is quoted in Naimark, *Stalin and the Fate of Europe*, 16. See also Eduard Mark, “Revolution by Degrees: Stalin’s National-Front Strategy for Europe, 1941–1947,” CWIHP Working Paper No. 31, Cold War International History Project, Washington, DC (February 2001), esp. 7 (<https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/revolution-degrees-stalins-national-front-strategy-for-europe-1941-1947>), and various articles in Stefan Creuzberger and Manfred Görtemaker, eds., *Gleichschaltung unter Stalin? Die Entwicklung der Parteien im östlichen Europa 1944–1949* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2002), esp. Gerhard Wertig, “Stalins Deutschland-Politik 1945–1949 vor dem Hintergrund seines Vorgehens im Osten Europas,” 24, and Monika Kaiser, “Es muss demokratisch aussehen . . .: Moskau und die Gleichschaltung des Parteiensystems in der sowjetischen Besatzungszone Deutschlands, 1944/45–1948/49,” 297–98. Note also the editors’ concluding essay in that volume: Stefan Creuzberger and Manfred Görtemaker, “Das Problem der Gleichschaltung osteuropäischer Parteien im Vergleich: Eine Synthese,” 422 and 429.

<sup>10</sup> Dimitrov diary, entry for 2 September 1946, in Ivo Banac, ed., *The Diary of Georgi Dimitrov, 1933–1949* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 413–14. Emphasis in original text. Naimark, incidentally, quotes Stalin as saying in October 1938: “All states adopt masks: if you live among wolves, you must behave like a wolf” (131)—a really extraordinary quotation.

<sup>11</sup> Norman Naimark and Leonid Gibianskii, eds., *Establishment of Communist Regimes in Eastern Europe, 1944–1949* (Boulder: Westview, 1997), 7–8. Emphasis in original text. They were referring to Hugh Seton-Watson, *The East European Revolution* (London: Methuen, 1950) and Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Soviet Bloc: Unity and Conflict* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960).

putting the new book down, I could not help wondering whether there was any reason today to question that basic conclusion.

---

 RESPONSE BY NORMAN M. NAIMARK, STANFORD UNIVERSITY
 

---

I want to begin by thanking Tom Maddux for putting together this interesting forum and the many others he has organized over the years. I also want to thank my colleagues for reading and exploring the issues that I wrote about in *Stalin and the Fate of Europe*. It is particularly gratifying that all of the contributors understood exactly what I was trying to do in the book and were able to place my arguments in the context of Cold War historiography as well as of my earlier attempts to think through Soviet goals and European politics in the immediate postwar period. Many thanks also go to Ronald Suny for introducing the discussion.

I am also appreciative that all of the readers approved of the case study method that I used to answer larger questions. Elidor Mēhilli talks about taking “deep dives,” and that is exactly what I tried to do, and enjoyed doing, especially in those cases I knew less about before engaging in the research. The readers also agreed with Hope Harrison and Mark Kramer, I think, that the book was “more than a sum of its parts.” Other cases could have been considered, most certainly, but everyone seemed to agree that the cases that were selected were illustrative of the larger arguments I was trying to make. Kramer suggests that selecting either the Bulgarian or Romanian case would have altered my overall conclusions about openness of outcomes and possibilities of alternative developments. I am not so sure. I suspect that delving deeply into those cases with the purpose of tracing the importance of internal political struggle within the Communist parties and between Moscow and the respective parties might have yielded results not terribly dissimilar the Polish case. It is true, of course, that the world's searchlights were focused on what was happening in Poland and thus may have altered (or delayed) Joseph Stalin's ultimate plans. The Western Allies paid little or no attention to southeastern Europe, which may well have affected the quick downward spiral into Communist dictatorship.

Patryk Babiracki writes that the book constitutes “a high wire act of interpretive scholarship,” dealing with “an epic game of three-dimensional chess” or a “grand, elaborate mechanism filled with countless delicate elements and moving parts.” Putting aside the somewhat exaggerated images, he nails the problem of the book on the head. I see enormous complexity in the postwar world and in Stalin's and the Soviet Union's interests in Europe. Mēhilli also identifies this kind of analysis as looking at “shades of gray.” I sometimes felt like the proverbial Hassidic rabbi constantly arguing with himself about the issues. Marc Trachtenberg's comment at one point that perhaps I might “half-agree” that the more traditional explanations of Stalin's behavior were on the mark. He is no doubt right. But only “half,” which means there is still room for looking at the history of the period from a different perspective and keeping one's mind open to potential trajectories frequently dismissed in analyses of the early years of the peace.

The events of the postwar period are, quite simply, not reduceable to the Cold War paradigm, and that is why I felt less and less happy with the recent historiography about them. As Trachtenberg notes, I did at one point write (together with Leonid Gibianskii) that Hugh Seton-Watson and Zbigniew Brzezinski had it right when they framed their analyses of postwar Eastern Europe as a takeover in stages by the Soviet Union.<sup>1</sup> But over time I have increasingly questioned what those stages really mean and whether they were planned in such short temporal dimensions from the very beginning. The stages are descriptive, certainly, of what happened. We can all agree on that. But did they have to happen in the way they did when they did and what exactly determined the shift from one stage to another, especially the one from the diversity of the immediate postwar period to Stalinization in 1948-49? One could also ask about Stalin's role, to return to John Gaddis's cogent and memorable assertion, mentioned by Babiracki, “as long as Stalin was running the Soviet Union, a Cold War was avoidable.”<sup>2</sup> I was impressed with this way of stating the problem, but not convinced. I tried in the book as best I could to challenge such ‘orthodox’ formulations, without suggesting that the alternative view was necessarily the right one. Responding to Harrison's point about whether the Europeans had as much to say about their sovereignty as Stalin, the point

---

<sup>1</sup> Norman Naimark and Leonid Gibianskii, eds., *The Establishment of Communist Regimes in Eastern Europe, 1944-1949* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1997), 8.

<sup>2</sup> John Lewis Gaddis, *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 19.

of the book was instead to demonstrate as best I could the importance of politics in the history of the individual cases. This did not mean that the outcomes of political struggle could in all or even most of the cases turn out to have defeated the objectives of Soviet power. I did not write counter-factual history, but other potential paths were always on my mind. I continue to believe, as Harrison notes at the beginning of her review, that this is crucial in writing about the early postwar period.

Mark Kramer generally thinks I did a reasonable job with the case studies but adds some intriguing and important arguments about each that I did not take account of or insufficiently explored. Let me deal with some of those emendations to the narrative histories here. I think he is unquestionably correct that the Bornholm episode contributed to the Danish government's decision to overcome its neutralist proclivities and join NATO. But I still think the main motivation for the Danes was the German manhandling of neutral Denmark during the war, which they still remember today. Like the French, the Danes were anxious to 'keep the Germans down,' as much as 'keep the Russians out.' The agreement of the Danes to keep foreign troops off the strategic island was an important concession to the Soviets that remains controversial among Danish commentators.

On the Berlin Blockade, Kramer appropriately notes that there is still a lot we do not know about Stalin and his intentions, especially regarding military operations. (Babiracki also emphasizes the crucial problem of evidence.) That is an important caveat in all of the cases I studied. But I do not believe that Stalin was 'misled by his advisors,' in this case most probably Military Commander of the Soviet Zone, General V. D. Sokolovskii, Political Advisor Vladimir Semenov, and Foreign Minister Viacheslav Molotov. Instead, the Moscow leadership collectively miscalculated the Americans' staying power in Berlin in good part because the Americans gave mixed signals themselves about leaving under pressure. One can misread an opponent, as Stalin clearly did, without being foolhardy or ignorant. Stalin was neither during the Blockade. The minimal 'prize' of Berlin was worth the gamble, or so he calculated. At the same time, as I argue, it was easy to miss on both the Soviet and American sides the determination of the Berliners to rally behind the West until it actually happened. Many Germans themselves were surprised by what transpired. When the demonstrations of anti-Soviet solidarity in the Western sectors did take place, and there were many of them during the period of the Blockade itself, I do not think Stalin was willing to force the issue by seizing the entire city. It well might have meant the blood of German civilians on the streets of Berlin and it could have served as a trip-wire for deepening Western military involvement in Germany, not to mention war. Stalin still hoped to win over the Germans to the cause of Soviet-sponsored unity and was determined to avoid at any cost military confrontation with the Americans.

"Why did Stalin have no fear of U.S. nuclear retaliation for the Berlin Blockade?," Kramer asks. We can only speculate about what Stalin 'thought' about this issue. But it is clear that he did not want to tangle with the American military in the least; nuclear weapons were only part of this calculation and certainly not the most important part. We also know that President Harry S. Truman was anxious to avoid war and did not want to use nuclear weapons in Europe. Stalin understood the USSR's manifest weaknesses and vulnerabilities as an economic and military power. At the same time, he must have been informed by his intelligence operatives, as Kramer suggests, that the American bombers transferred to English bases had no nuclear weapons on hand and were not readily capable of carrying nuclear bombs if they were.

It is a pleasure as always to read Marc Trachtenberg on the issues of postwar diplomacy. He and Mèhilli make a similar point that the interactions between Stalin and the Communist leaders in Europe were not unidimensional and straightforwardly hierarchical, as is too often indicated in the historiography. The European Communists thought of themselves as loyal to Moscow and the Communist international cause, but also as independent political actors working on behalf of the interests and sovereignty of their nations. To reiterate from the book, this was also a significant part of the message about People's Democracy that Stalin purveyed to them during and immediately after the war. Trachtenberg is right that Italian Communist leader Palmiro Togliatti took this message seriously and, though an avowed 'Stalinist,' nevertheless guided the Italian Communist Party (PCI) along a distinctive path to taking control of the government. Polish Communist Party chief Władysław Gomułka also took People's Democracy at face value and sought, as Trachtenberg also notes, to foster that iteration of Communist rule in Poland. It was unlikely, but also not impossible, that he could have succeeded.

I do not think, as Trachtenberg argues, that to Stalin Italy was no more than a “bargaining chip” with the West at the end of the war. It bears repeating that Stalin thought and hoped that the Americans would return their troops home after the war, as promised by President Franklin Roosevelt and indicated by Truman, as well. The British and Americans—as Marxist-Leninist ideology predicted and some of his advisors suggested—would engage in a world-wide struggle with each other for colonies and wealth. France and Italy, which had been bullied and occupied by the Nazis, and which had strong Communist parties, demoralized ‘bourgeois’ leaders, and were gripped by economic and social crises, were ripe for the plucking. One of the arguments in the book is that Stalin had his eye on much more than Eastern Europe. What would have happened if the PCI front had won the election in April 1948, as many predicted with considerable justification in east and west? Then Stalin’s strategy of implementing a People’s Democracy program would have succeeded in Italy, much as it had in Czechoslovakia, at least until February of 1948. I agree with Trachtenberg that this strategy did not determine political outcomes, but it certainly set the framework for them wherever the Soviets exerted influence.

The larger issue of Germany is brought up by both Babiracki and Trachtenberg. Babiracki argues, as have others, that Stalin was happy to turn the Soviet zone into a Communist controlled state as soon as possible.<sup>3</sup> “Wouldn’t that give him the upper hand in any future conflict, hot or cold?” My answer is no – not if the larger, stronger, more industrialized, and potentially re-militarized West Germany was dominated by the Americans, which was happening in the Soviet view with frightening alacrity. This is precisely why Stalin engaged in the gamble of the Berlin Blockade, to try to stop that development if at all possible, and, at a minimum, to seize the western sectors of Berlin. The question for the Soviets in East Germany was not People’s Democracy versus Communist hegemony, but how best to turn that piece of relatively uninteresting real estate into part of a neutral, demilitarized Germany that would be free of Western domination and thus susceptible to Soviet influence from the east. Kramer wisely notes the relationship between the German and Austrian questions. The idea of neutralizing (and neutering!) these Germanic territories was part of the story, because that would mean the withdrawal of Western allied (and we are talking in the main about American) troops and the continuing presence of Soviet forces over the borders to the east of Germany in Poland and to the east of Austria in Hungary, in particular. In my view, the Soviet Zone of Germany, even the German Democratic Republic (GDR) after its formation in October 1949, was there to help the Soviets achieve those all-German goals, at the least until Stalin’s death. Sure, the Communists should keep political developments in their hands, as Stalin’s famous statement to Communist boss Walter Ulbricht indicated, but certainly in the first years of the occupation the goal was not to build a Communist state, because that would hinder unification. If one needed a police apparatus to keep the citizenry in line and opposition parties compliant, which was natural for a Soviet-administered territory, then so be it, as long as it was under Moscow’s ultimate control.

The Potsdam issues that Trachtenberg raises are important and evocative of major questions in the postwar German settlement: reparations, de-militarization, and German unity. As indicated above, my reading of Stalin overall and of Potsdam and its documentation is not one that supports the contention that in the summer of 1945 the Soviets were interested in dividing Germany. On the contrary, everything points to their formal and real adherence to what they called the ‘Potsdam principles,’ despite the frequent violations of those principles as they built the administrative machinery to rule in their zone. It may well be that their diplomatic efforts, especially to receive the level of reparations promised at Yalta, misfired through aggressive tactics and bullying. We know that Stalin pushed Molotov to take ‘hard’ diplomatic positions. The Soviets were also anxious to cover up their own program of the seizure and dismantling of allegedly German assets. It strikes me that “the level of industry” issue raised by Trachtenberg relates directly to the extreme need of the Soviet Union for immediate economic relief from Germany, which cannot be exaggerated, and contradictory American interests in getting Germany back on its feet industrially. This was not about wanting Germany divided, but an attempt to cut a deal with the West that would yield access to the critical resources of the Ruhr and to industrial reparations in the western zones. Fearing the specter of German revanchism, none of the Allies wanted to be blamed for the division of the country, Stalin and the Soviets least of all.

---

<sup>3</sup> For the best of this work, see, for example, Jochen Laufer, *Pax Sovietica: Stalin, die Westmächte und die deutsche Frage 1941-1945* (Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 2009), 559-562; Marc Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace: The Making of the European Settlement 1945-1963* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 86-91.

Thanks again to the commentators for their careful reading, able summaries, and good and appropriate questions about my book. In the midst of the novel coronavirus pandemic and upheaval in America's cities it can feel like the subject of the Soviet Union and postwar Europe is worlds away. But a forum like this can help us understand that the historical issues remain salient and worth discussing.