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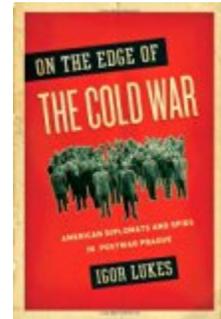
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Igor Lukes. *On the Edge of the Cold War: American Diplomats and Spies in Postwar Prague*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012. XII, 279 S. \$34.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-19-516679-8.

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Washington Sends in the B-Team: The U.S. Embassy in Post-World War II Prague Tackles the Looming Threat of Stalinism

For many years, Western historians have neglected the events surrounding the Communist takeover in Czechoslovakia in 1948. In most cold war histories, February 1948 might rate a paragraph or two. In addition, historians have not systematically evaluated in depth the personalities and decisions behind American policy related to this takeover. Igor Lukes's study helps to fill this gap by focusing on U.S. policy regarding the events taking shape in Czechoslovakia, and also brings additional perspective and insight into domestic Czechoslovak politics as democratic and Communist forces vied for influence and power.

Much of the previous literature describing or explaining the events leading up to February 1948 was not available to large audiences. Several prominent Czech exile politicians, for example, produced their reflections in the decade or so after 1948, but many memoirs were available only in Czech. Furthermore, Czechoslovak Communist historians wrote mere hagiographies, often ignoring or misrepresenting what their own leaders had done or said. In 1959, Joseph Korb published a widely used monograph, *The Communist Subversion of Czechoslovakia, 1938-1948*, which analyzed Czechoslovak thinking and politics following the Munich Conference. It focused on the internal political situation of a democratic exile government that returned to Prague to face a competing Czechoslovak Communist Party and the growth of Soviet power and influence following World War II. Most works after Korb's have centered on Czechoslovakia caught

up in the politics of the iron curtain or the events of the Prague Spring.

Lukes's research is impressive and meticulously footnoted. He includes a list of archival sources; however, a bibliography of memoirs and secondary sources would also have been helpful. He has collected a significant number of personal interviews of U.S. participants from those years, and he extensively uses the papers of Laurence A. Steinhardt, U.S. ambassador to Czechoslovakia. Lukes carefully utilizes many different primary sources, consulting a wide variety of archival sources in both U.S. and Czech archives, many of which have never been systematically studied or evaluated. Not only does he use the National Archives in Maryland and other Western archives, but he also examines a wide variety of archives in Prague. Among the most informative Czech archives for his study are the Archives of the Ministry of Interior, the Archives of the Foreign Intelligence Service of the Czech Republic, the State Security Archives, and the Military Counterintelligence Archives. These sources reveal what American diplomats and spies as well as their Czechoslovak counterparts were thinking or how they were reacting to events. It is not clear whether Lukes tried to file a Freedom of Information Act request to release the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) documents on the 1948 takeover.

The book begins with a summary of several U.S. policymakers' views of the geopolitical significance of

Czechoslovakia in the context of the rising cold war confrontation between the Soviet Union and the United States following World War II. The perspective of U.S. policymakers (including Generals Dwight D. Eisenhower and George C. Marshall) hinged on their hopeful assumptions regarding Joseph Stalin's future goals. The assumptions concerning Soviet policy determined American views of the future of Czechoslovakia and predictions about Czechoslovakia's position in postwar Europe. Chapter 1 summarizes the role of President Edvard Beneš from the Munich crisis in 1938 until near the end of World War II. During this fateful period, Beneš tied postwar Czechoslovakia to a Soviet alliance. The following chapters begin to focus more on U.S. reactions to the rising rivalry with Moscow and the role a resurrected Czechoslovakia might play in the postwar world. The emphasis of Lukes's study is on Prague-Washington connections with limited analysis of the Slovak situation, reflecting the U.S. preoccupation with the Prague government.

General Eisenhower's fateful (and much debated) judgment not to liberate Prague marks the beginning of a series of decisions that made it difficult for the United States to gain much diplomatic leverage or influence in postwar Czechoslovakia. Both the U.S. State Department and the British were opposed to this military decision. Events would show that there would not be any counterbalance to the growing Soviet influence over the returning exile government. In addition, the Communist Party used the American decision not to liberate Prague as ammunition in the coming years (and decades) to build the case that it was only Moscow that Czechoslovakia could rely on.

As Lukes develops the following chapters, he describes the return of the U.S. mission to the Schönborn Palace led by Ambassador Steinhardt. It quickly emerges that the preparation, commitment, and judgment of the diplomatic team assembled over the next three years left much to be desired. Lukes analyzes the strengths and weaknesses of Steinhardt and his embassy staff and is careful to be fair in his analysis. The evidence indicates that the American mission was inept, at best erratic, in its judgments and analyses of the conditions the United States and the democratic forces in Czechoslovakia faced. Steinhardt was a political appointee under Franklin Delano Roosevelt and had filled several diplomatic appointments previous to his posting to Prague. He was at times focused more on his business interests in New York or his social life in Prague than exercising the needed leadership to deal with the diplomatic needs at hand. Furthermore, his embassy staff was poorly prepared for their as-

signments and often more interested in romance and the excitement of parties and dinners. The staff's scattered focus often produced contradictory reports and errors in analysis of what exactly was happening in Prague and how Washington should respond.

The Czechoslovak archives reveal that the embassy was infiltrated by informants. Even when intelligence staff was brought into the embassy, many of these individuals seemed to be oblivious to compromised security within the embassy. As events of 1948 drew closer, Communists had a much clearer view of what was happening in the embassy than embassy staff had of what was unfolding in the streets and back rooms of Prague. In fact, there is a strong case that at least one double agent was at work. Perhaps the most heroic actions of embassy employees were their attempts to smuggle several "friends" to the Austrian or German borders.

Lukes's work is more than a study of postwar events in one country in Eastern Europe caught up in the rivalry between Washington and Moscow. He makes a significant contribution to the field of cold war studies. Although the Communist takeover in Czechoslovakia was unique and delayed compared to other East European countries, Lukes gives insight not just into the role of U.S. policy, but also into Moscow's reactions and its perceptions of Washington as well as what was happening in the Prague government. His work serves as an excellent case study of how various U.S. diplomats and intelligence staff responded to events that the United States and Czechoslovakia were facing from 1945 to 1948. As Lukes follows the documentary trail of events and decisions, he paints a precise and unique picture of U.S. diplomatic operations with regard to post-1945 cold war conflict in Eastern Europe—by utilizing embassy papers, cables, and reports, one sees the diplomatic process taking place at its most fundamental level. The evidence presented leaves one wondering how effectively and efficiently other embassies and their staffs operated throughout the cold war. Diplomats, intelligence officers, and Washington bureaucrats bring to bear their personal knowledge, training, and judgment to the development of policy—most of the time this "micro" level of diplomacy is left unanalyzed.

Lukes has written what will be the major account of this period in U.S.-Czechoslovak relations for many years to come. It should also be seen as offering points of discussion to broader foreign policy issues. Hopefully the Department of State and embassy staffs have learned to operate with a higher degree of competence and sophistication than their predecessors in Prague between 1945 and 1948.

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