

Stalin's Wars Roundtable Review



Reviewed Work:

Geoffrey Roberts. *Stalin's Wars. From World War to Cold War 1939-1953.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007. 496 pp. Illustrations, maps, chronology, bibliographical references, index. ISBN-10: 0300112041.

Roundtable Chair: Warren F. Kimball (moderator)

Reviewers: Caroline Kennedy-Pipe, Thomas R. Maddux, Constantine Pleshakov, Gerhard L. Weinberg, Vladislav Zubok

H-Diplo Roundtable Editor: Diane N. Labrosse

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Introduction by Warren F. Kimball, Robert Treat Professor Emeritus, Rutgers University
(and immoderate roundtable moderator)

STALIN AS WARLORD

Thirty years ago, this would have been an heretical book, beyond mere left-revisionism. Twenty years ago, it would have been courageous, controversial, and condemned. Ten years ago, it would have roiled the waters, but could not then have contributed much in the way of new evidence to the debate. Today, three decades after the Cold War ended and the Soviet Union disintegrated, this “re-visioning” of Josef Stalin as “warlord,” receives a respectful reception, whatever the disagreements, from a wide range of accomplished historians (thanks to Diane Labrosse’s tireless recruiting efforts). That alone speaks volumes.

The general consensus of the reviews is that:

- (a) Roberts has provided the best, most comprehensive English-language presentation of the new evidence revealed by Soviet-era sources that became available starting in the mid-1980s;
- (b) Roberts’ interpretation of Stalin’s motives, goals, and actions is, for most of the reviewers, uncomfortably positive;
- (c) Roberts demonstrates that, for the most part, Stalin was an effective warlord during the Second World War, but to call him “indispensable,” as Roberts does, is well over the top. For example, none of the reviewers accepted Roberts’ efforts to explain Stalin’s “catastrophic failure” in June 1941. In Roberts’ response to the reviewers, he asserts that he corrects, not overcorrects, a distorted image of Stalin created by cold war propaganda and the polemics of destalinisation. Whatever the reviewers’ disagreements with some specifics, they all seem to agree that overall Roberts has succeeded.
- (d) treating Stalin-as-warlord during World War II and the Cold War as a “continuum” is a constructive and sensible way to look at history.

Warren F. Kimball is Robert Treat Professor Emeritus at Rutgers University and was Mark A. Clark Distinguished Visiting Professor of History, The Citadel (2002-4). His many publications include *Churchill & Roosevelt: The Complete Correspondence* (3 vols.; Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1984); *Forged in War: Roosevelt, Churchill and the Second World War* (New York: William Morrow; London: Harper-Collins, 1997; paperback 1998; Chicago: Ivan Dee, 2003); *Allies at War: The American, British, and Soviet Experience in the Second World War*, co-editor (NY: St. Martin's, 1994; Russian language edition--Moscow: "Hayka," 1995); *America Unbound: World War II and the Making of a Super-Power*, editor (NY: St. Martin's, 1992); *The Juggler: Franklin Roosevelt as Wartime Statesman* (Princeton and London: Princeton Univ. Press, 1991; paperback, 1994).

I would add a gloss on those points of consensus:

(a) One anonymous scholar who wishes to avoid ideological disputes and, on those grounds, declined to review the book, dismissed claims of new evidence because “there are maybe 25 footnotes to archives--and many of these overlap on just a few files.” Perhaps. But all those who reviewed the book agreed with Zubok’s observation that “Roberts sums up impressive amount of new archival evidence: diaries, and all kind of other sources, Western and Soviet, that have been painstakingly collected by other researchers, . . . Most of the Russian new evidence has been already published in Russian, yet Roberts is one of the first scholars who incorporates it into Western historiography.” That is a huge contribution. Yet, as Roberts wrote recently about his research since 1996 in Soviet era archives in Moscow -- “The Presidential Archive, the most important archive for materials on high-level politics during the Soviet era, remained firmly closed to foreign scholars.”¹ When I recently asked one Russian historian about access for Russian scholars to that archive, he replied that if anything remains closed, only the archivists know about it – a classic “catch 22.”

(b) It is good for historians to feel uncomfortable.

(c) Being “indispensable” is a too-high hurdle. It makes a silk purse out of sow’s ear to claim, as Roberts does, that the Winter War against Finland was anything less than an embarrassment and near-failure of warlordship. Similarly Roberts’ attempt to explain away Stalin’s failure to heed Soviet intelligence about German intentions in June 1941. Roberts argues that while the Soviet leader knew of German preparations and expected some sort of attack, he did not expect the massive strategic attack that Hitler launched. Instead, Stalin seemed to be planning on how to crush the German Army once war broke out. The disconnect in such logic is apparent in this short paragraph that I’ve written, and even more so in the book. “Strategic defense had no place in the doctrinal universe of the Soviet High command,” wrote Roberts (p. 80), but whatever the strategic doctrine of Stalin and the Stavka, it proved inadequate and nearly disastrous in 1941. Hardly the hallmark of “the greatest military leader of the twentieth century,” to quote the over-the-top dust-jacket phrasing. Roberts dismisses the Suvorov [Rezun] thesis that Stalin planned a preemptive strike against the German and that Hitler attacked in order to beat the Soviets to the punch, but that still leaves an indelible portrait of Stalin as inept and indecisive.

Roberts’ main and very persuasive thesis (advocated by David Glantz) about Soviet military strategy--that Stalin and the Stavka were and remained committed to the “cult of attack and counterattack”--does not explain Stalin’s actions in June 1941, but it does offer a very useful structure for understanding how Stalin waged war

¹ Geoffrey Roberts, “Inside the Russian Archives,” *Newsletter of the British International History Group*, No. 12 (March 2006), 8.

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thereafter. The "cult of attack and counterattack" described throughout the book was a strategy that ultimately won the war, and by the time of the pivotal Kursk battle, Stalin and his generals had come to realize that "strategic defense" could set up offensive opportunities.

But that military doctrine combined with Stalin's callous disregard for human life created one of his most monstrous mistakes -- massive and unnecessary casualty rates (mentioned by Roberts). That trenchant criticism of Stalin as warlord came from within in the mid-1980s as Soviet, soon-to-be-Russian, historians whispered during meetings of a joint British-American-Soviet project on the history of the Second World War. Those cautious whispers surfaced with publication of the book, *Allies at War* (New York, 1994; Moscow, 1995). The final paragraph of the essay written by a Russian historian about Soviet military strategy summarized the total casualties (20 million for the two armies) on the Russian front, concluding that "such was the enormous price of the direct confrontation of the main forces of both countries on the battlefield. For the Red Army it could and should have been lower." (p. 52.)

Whatever Stalin's successes, I would suggest that the only historically indispensable Second World War warlord was Adolf Hitler. Without his all too often shrewd but ultimately insane leadership there is no World War Two as we know it. I leave it to novelists (and Niall Ferguson?) to speculate on what might have been.

(d) The Second World War/Cold War continuum has political validity. (Of course history is an unbroken skein.) Yet that assumes that the Cold War was a war, with a warlord, in the same sense as the Second World War. World War II grand strategy combined politics and the battlefield, requiring a constant and forceful combination of commander-in-chief and international political leader. Not so for the Soviet Union in the Cold War era of conflict by proxies when Soviet leadership was essentially a matter of politics, however threatening. (Perhaps Roberts and Zubok subtly give that difference by not capitalizing "cold war" -- or is that ee cummings at work?) Once the Second World War ends, the book becomes a standard analysis of early Cold War politics. Roberts emphasizes the provocative actions taken by the Americans and the West rather than Stalin's harsh measures in East Europe as causing the Cold War and ending Stalin's interest in international cooperation. But that is an old, well-worn argument. However much I agree that Stalin looked for a cooperative postwar relationship with the great powers that would secure both Soviet safety and interests, a "great" war leader would not have prompted Kennedy-Pipe to ask (perceptively): "how [did] the Generalissimo come to misread the international politics of the United States in these questions, providing for a Cold War structure that certainly the Soviet dictator did not wish for." How indeed?

Then there is ideology, a word that has been tossed about surprisingly little in these reviews, but quite a bit in other reviews of the book. Within limits, ideology is productive

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here. After all, the historiography of Stalin's leadership has been clouded by those both Roberts and Pleshakov call the "cold war polemicists." But those who say that "Stalin's victory over Hitler should rather be seen as a defeat for the half of Europe that became subsumed under his totalitarian rule" (as quoted by Pleshakov) are an easy target. Their a-historical vision is wishful, not realistic. Time and again they have backed away from that whinge when confronted with the military reality that victory over Hitler and his allies required the massive force of the Red Army. Again in Pleshakov's words: "Roberts also deplores 'the more subtle downgrading' of Stalin by authors [diarists and memoirists like Churchill] who 'sidelined the strategic importance of the Soviet-German conflict and reduced its role in the overall narrative of the Second World War.' . . . [W]ith all due respect, Iwo Jima was not a Stalingrad."

But with nearly two decades of post-Cold War scholarship behind us, surely we are beyond the point where the Pacific War or even the Normandy invasion can be viewed as equal in scope or significance to the Red Army's campaigns on the eastern fronts. That does not take away from the bravery of Private Ryan or from the importance of the defeat of Japan (which inserted the United States into the geopolitics of East Asia), but it does put the Second World War in proper perspective. Hitler's Germany was defeated in Europe by the Soviet Union. The Normandy invasion ensured the presence of Anglo-American forces in western Europe at war's end, but it did not defeat Hitler. Had the Russians not stopped the Germany Army at the gates of Moscow, then won at Stalingrad and Kursk, and then rolled through central Europe, the world we live in today would not exist. The Red Army fought successfully for three years before *The* Second Front became reality. The British fought longer and just as bravely, but at best could only have quarantined the Germans on the continent, and then only with American help. Someone led that winning Soviet war effort, costly as it was. That leader, Josef Stalin, was without question a successful warlord.

I leave postmodern ideological disputes to Geoff Roberts and his critics.

Because much in the reviews, and the book, focuses on the politics of war, a few words on those issues -- which are the ones that provide a bridge to the politics of the Cold War. There are numerous examples: the failure/refusal to send the Red Army into Warsaw in autumn 1944; whether or not Stalin hoped to pursue a cooperative internationalist course after the war; whether or not the Sovietization of Europe was planned or caused or was the result of the Cold War dynamic, and so on. Historians can and have guessed about the answers to those and similar questions for decades. Historians have tried to construct *ex post facto* answers by examining what happened. We may never be able to do any better than that. Still, the existence of the "Presidential Archive" and the all too sparse but beguiling comments of historians who have gotten glimpses into those records, suggests that full access could finally let us know what Stalin thought, what he planned, and perhaps

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most intriguing -- how he reacted to Western policies.² Thanks to Roberts' research, we have come further down the path, but not far enough.

Weinberg questions Roberts' dismissal of apparent/rumored Soviet flirtations with making a separate peace with Germany, while describing his "obsession" over the possibility that Churchill was reaching out to Berlin. Today it seems clear that none of the Big Three ever gave such a separate peace effort any serious consideration. But it is equally clear that those suspicions affected the politics of war. Whatever Stalin's fears, why did he sanction feelers that he knew (or must have known) would reach the Anglo-Americans? Where do his obsessive fears and provocations (as he would have called such feelers) fit into the story of Stalin as war leader?

Still on the politics of war, I confess to puzzlement at the assertion of reviewer Thomas Maddux that "At Tehran and Yalta Stalin encouraged Churchill and FDR to show their cards on the major issues and responded to them by collecting their concession chips from the table and readily agreeing on what appeared to be less important Soviet concerns" Plausible, as far as it goes. But it doesn't go nearly far enough. Roosevelt and Churchill were remarkably candid in their meetings with Stalin because (a) he was their ally, and (b) they hoped to establish a long-term cooperative postwar relationship. Moreover, as David Reynolds has suggested, Stalin suffered a major setback at Yalta when he failed to get the harsh reparations and dismemberment of Germany he wanted and expected. Maddux goes on to state that "Stalin continued his successful manipulation that he had earlier practiced in using the absence of an Allied second front in Europe in pressing Churchill and FDR to accede to the primacy of the Soviet role in defeating Nazi Germany and, thereby, the legitimacy of Soviet demands." Certainly the Soviet leader tried to use the Second Front issue to gain leverage over Anglo-American actions. But Churchill and Roosevelt still suspended supply convoys, launched TORCH, invaded Italy, kept the atomic secret, and conducted an invasion of western Europe that was, in good part, designed to ensure that the Anglo-Americans were on the continent, in force, as a counterweight to the Soviet Union. Successful manipulation?

When all is said and done, the reviewers, each in their own way, echo the hard question Kennedy-Pipe poses, a question, she writes, "that Roberts does not really address. . . . the relationship between the techniques of politics and the purposes of politics. The assumption that seems to guide Roberts here is that there is a disjuncture between the two -- that one can admire political technique, political skill in war and peace independently of what one considers the ends of politics to be and whether or not the relevant political system is addressing them. Yet it is surely not off the point to suggest that this is far from being clear. It was Hannah Arendt, in *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, who pointed out most clearly that the mark of barbarism is the failure to connect a political system and all the values it sustains with the personal virtues of its inhabitants."

² I am fascinated by the revelations about Stalin's reactions to FDR's famous "promise" in May 1942 of a Second Front that are found in Oleg Rzheshevsky (ed.), *War and Diplomacy: The Making of the Grand Alliance: Documents from Stalin's Archives* (Amsterdam: Harwood Publ., 1996).

Given the current and recent desire of the United States to combat the influence of dictators such as Slobodan Milosevic, Saddam, and Kim Jong-Il, a book about one of the greatest - or most infamous - of previous dictators opposed by the United States is obviously timely. Geoffrey Roberts' new book on Stalin, however, is not only timely but, in certain respects courageous, because any attempt to find positive aspects in the actions and mentality of a man now almost universally reviled is bound to meet with opposition, ire and a degree of controversy. And so it has proved. Some reviewers have already seen in this book an apologia for a man without a redeeming feature and a system that has been thoroughly discredited. To find anything that is good in the dictatorship of Josef Stalin is a step too far for those quite accustomed to focussing on the - unquestionably - very dark features of Stalin's rule.

Caroline Kennedy-Pipe is a Professor at the University of Warwick. She is the author of *Russia and the World (1998)* and *The Origins of the Cold War (2007)* as well as a number of articles in *Journal of Cold War Studies*, *International Affairs*, and *International Relations*.

Of course, the crime list is familiar. Even before the outbreak of World War Two, Stalin was guilty of what we would now term genocide against his own people, guilty of the suppression of human rights, the purging of intellectuals, the military, and the scientists, and the wholesale eradication of dignity for many caught in the gulags. During the early years of world war, Stalin's 'cunning' was in the minds of many, responsible for the betrayal of the Baltic States and indeed of the Western powers themselves through the Nazi-Soviet Pact. Soviet neutrality as guaranteed by that pact provided cover for Hitler on his eastern flank while he waged war in the west. The subsequent Soviet occupation of eastern Poland and the conflict with Finland ended with Helsinki agreeing to Soviet terms and the eroding of Finnish sovereignty. In addition to Stalin's duplicity towards the West, there is a general agreement that as war leader he committed a catastrophic error in not foreseeing the betrayal by Hitler in 1941. The devastating *volte face* by Hitler and the German invasion of the USSR has been characterised by a variety of sources as Stalin's greatest strategic error. Dmitri Volkogonov, a previous biographer of Stalin, claimed it was an error of catastrophic proportions. Stories abound of the dictator suffering a nervous breakdown as a result of this blunder, while military historians debate how and why the strategic deceptions of Hitler outplayed the usually wily Stalin.

In his book Roberts quite clearly seeks to argue against quite a lot of this. He does not deny that Stalin was hardly a poster boy for the liberal intelligentsia, does not minimize his cruelty, and does not engage in an extended apologia for the regime. But he does work hard to try and dispel a number of myths - not least the one of the dictator's breakdown - and argues that, considered simply as a political actor and especially as a war leader, Stalin has been grossly underestimated. Scholars of course have long disagreed about Stalin and his capacities and capabilities as warlord. There is, however, no doubt over his central role

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and command of the Soviet rebuttal of Germany and subsequent victory. Stalin was Supreme Commander of the Soviet armed forces, head of the State Defence Council and People's Commissar for Defence, as well as head of the Party and the Government. Stalin himself oversaw most of the detail of the war as well as strategic decision-making. In this context, Stalin stands accused of a catalogue of errors both tactical and strategic -- the ill-conceived offensives, the refusal to countenance strategic retreats and the meddling in frontline situations. And there is the criticism, so compelling in this current casualty-averse age, that Stalin was careless and indifferent to the sheer scale of suffering endured by the Soviet Army and peoples. Did the Soviet Union really need to lose some 8 million men to death and some 8 million to injury? Was this, in itself not revealing of the nature of the man and his regime? Was Order No 227, dubbed not 'one step back' really necessary?

To add to this catalogue of cruelty by the Soviet dictator is also the now well known story of Stalin as duplicitous wartime ally and the sole architect of the Cold War. It is argued most notably in what we know as the traditionalist account of the Cold War that even as World War II unfolded Stalin foresaw the emerging global competition with the United States and sought from 1943 onwards to demarcate Soviet influence throughout East and Central Europe, to ensure that Churchill and Roosevelt agreed to Soviet post war aims and to irrevocably crush democracy. In this version Stalin raced for Berlin to ensure control of Germany, sought to carve out an Empire throughout Europe and sought footholds in the Middle East and Asia. As the great Cold War historian John Lewis Gaddis has argued, with Stalin in power it was inevitable that confrontation would occur. How could democracies such as the United States adequately deal with this ruthless and cunning agent of Communism? The answer, we know was under the stewardship of Harry S Truman and his successors the adoption of containment, the advocacy of nuclear deterrence, and the construction of a new international economic order designed to isolate and marginalize Soviet interests and ambitions. In addition, the West created brand-new institutions such as NATO to stand against the omnipresent Soviet threat. Part and parcel of this story is the duping of politicians such as Roosevelt as to the true and essential nature of the dictator. Even those historians who concede Stalin's personal charm, grasp of detail and vision, have lamented the inability of Western diplomats and politicians to deal effectively with the dictator in the war years over key issues such as Poland and the division of Germany.

So what does Roberts have to offer us in this book which would sustain his claim that we should rightly consider Stalin the wartime generalissimo? In the first place, Roberts offers us unparalleled expertise and insight into the Russian sources. Roberts has clearly been a veritable 'mole' in the Russian archives over a number of years which enables him with some authority to marshal new evidence and offer new sources that strengthen his claims. This in itself is an impressive achievement. The book is an extremely powerful catalogue of primary evidence that all scholars will find useful and stimulating for years to come.

Secondly, Roberts also does something else which at this historical juncture is important. He reminds us in the chapters on the war years that conflict is in fact always brutal, in so many ways senseless, but that it may also be an effective – perhaps the only effective -

instrument for dealing with expansionist revisionist powers. He also reminds us that in this particular case, the war was actually won not by gallant Britain or generous America (although Britain was gallant and America was generous) but through the blood and suffering of the Soviet people. The Soviet figures are quite simply awesome in terms of loss and heroism and yes barbarity. The German army inflicted huge wounds right up to the very bitter end in the battle over Berlin. There is no reason to suppose that Stalin wished to take these losses any more than there is reason or evidence to support that he sought to sacrifice his own people to fascism.

Roberts points to the compelling connection between the war years and the peace sought by Stalin. Roberts underlines the experiences of the war with Germany as directly feeding into Soviet expectations for the post-war era. It is clear that whatever we now see of a benign Germany wearied by its militaristic past that Stalin had a clear view of German potential, power, and ambition. Roberts again and again reminds us of Stalinist fears that Russia would face a resurgent Germany unrestrained by a failing France and Britain and an indifferent and isolationist America. Many historians of the Cold War seem to have forgotten or make light of the connection between Soviet sacrifice and Soviet expectations. This is a rather peculiar omission especially by American scholars. American losses in Vietnam of some 58,000 dead are accepted to have affected the conduct of foreign policy for decades and indeed still cast long shadows over contemporary conflicts, yet there is little attention paid to the Soviet war dead. Roberts does not make the mistake of ignoring the ghosts of war – there is to his mind an intimate connection between the Soviet war experience and its construction of the peace. Roberts points to this as the motor for wishing to see Germany destroyed and constrained but his point is one that he has made before – the dictator sought cooperation, not confrontation, with the United States.

Roberts also make a third point about Stalin and his expectations after the war. Soviet sacrifice needed to be rewarded after the defeat of Germany and Japan. Here there was a good old fashioned geo-political interest at stake. Russia had to be preserved from future threats with the construction of a sphere of influence in Central and Eastern Europe. For Stalin this was for a number of reasons simply non-negotiable. However the dictator proved surprisingly phlegmatic over rebuffs over Soviet influence in the Turkish straits, Iran, and Greece.

Yet, as Roberts points out, these confrontations of 1946 necessarily soured the mood of wartime cooperation and inspired the first steps to Cold War. However, Stalin did not seek Cold War but rather, as Roberts argues, wanted to pursue the benefits of alliance. He charts in some detail the Soviet attempts to keep the grand alliance on the rails, for example citing the deliberately restrained response to Churchill's celebrated Fulton Speech. According to Roberts, what put the final the nails into the coffin of post-war cooperation was the prospects of a new international economic order as signalled through the Marshall Plan – a new international order from which the USSR was excluded. As Roberts highlights while Western leaders spoke of Soviet expansionism, Stalin complained of Anglo-American globalism. (p.25) Roberts charts the Soviet response in terms of a reinvigoration of

ideological struggle and a catalogue of missteps which merely hardened American resolve. Here the Berlin crisis, the Czech coup, and Soviet involvement in the outbreak of the Korean War were errors, the last of which had the potential to make real the nuclear threat. One fascinating question is how the Generalissimo came to misread the international politics of the United States in these questions, providing for a Cold War structure that certainly the Soviet dictator did not wish for.

Here again Roberts points to something that is a rather unfashionable point but clearly central for all that: the importance of ideology in the making of foreign policy. Roberts clearly details the influence and, yes, hopes of the Soviet dictator that there would be a left wing swing within Europe after the war and that Communism could and would spread. He was, of course, wrong and Communist power in Europe proved illusory. The interesting question here is not why Stalin was wrong - and Roberts is clear that Stalin accepted the failure of Communism throughout Western Europe - but why a buoyant and prosperous U.S. felt so threatened by the ideas which at best became pretty marginal to the politics of Western Europe and the United States.

What Roberts does brilliantly is to ask the question as to why Stalin's contemporaries such as Churchill and Roosevelt had perhaps a better grasp of his personality and politics than those who came after them. And he makes very clear that part of their admiration was the admiration of two extremely clever and experienced political actors for a third. And, he suggests, we should take that admiration as a serious fact. Of course, Stalin made mistakes, as a politician and as a war leader - but then what politician and war leader does not? What Roberts insists on, however, - and what the evidence he has assembled in this books forces us to confront - is that *without* Stalin's leadership the Nazi's might just have won the war and that therefore even those of us who despise him owe him a good deal.

There is, then, in this book a sobering argument that those who decry the communist experiment and deny it any positive role in the ideological and geopolitical transformations of the twentieth century must come to terms with. There is also a powerful marshalling of the historical record that suggests negative judgements on Stalin's leadership need to be reconsidered. Overall, this is a powerful and impressive book that makes an important case well. But we might perhaps close by just posing one question that Robert does not really address. That is simply the relationship between political leadership and political system, or, perhaps better, between the techniques of politics and the purposes of politics. The assumption that seems to guide Roberts here is that there is a disjuncture between the two - that one can admire political technique, political skill in war and peace independently of what one considers the ends of politics to be and whether or not the relevant political system is addressing them. Yet it is surely not off the point to suggest that this is far from being clear. It was Hannah Arendt, in *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, who pointed out most clearly that the mark of barbarism is the failure to connect a political system and all the values it sustains with the personal virtues of its inhabitants. While we cannot fault Roberts for not answering a question he never really asks, is it not the case that for his rehabilitation of Stalin to truly convince, he would need to ask, and answer, it?

Geoffrey Roberts' *Stalin's Wars: From World War to Cold War 1939-1945* is a very impressive study that brings together his previous contributions in four different books, numerous influential articles, and new research in Russian archives. This study is freshest and most stimulating on Stalin's leadership during WWII, less groundbreaking on the Cold War, and most debatable with respect to Roberts' thesis on the Cold War. The author suggests that Stalin did not want a Cold War, although his actions contributed to it. Furthermore, Roberts considers the Cold War as perhaps avoidable if Western leaders had been more understanding of Stalin and the Soviet Union's critical and enormously costly contributions during WWII and the intensity Soviet security concerns about Germany and Japan in the postwar negotiations.

Thomas R. Maddux is Professor of History and Department Chair at California State University, Northridge. His is also a Roundtable and Article reviews editor at H-Diplo. He is the author of Years of Estrangement: American Relations with the Soviet Union, 1933-1941 (1980), articles, and many reviews in the field.

The research in Russian archives and experienced perspective that shapes Roberts' study helps end the disconnect in Cold War literature since the 1960s. Traditional and revisionist U.S. historians, who neither read Russian nor had access to Russian archives during the Cold War, relied selectively on the limited literature on Stalin and Soviet foreign policy and found Russian specialists who would support their preferred assumptions about Stalin's perspective and objectives. Traditionalists stressed a view of Stalin as the unreliable leader of a totalitarian regime with a Marxist-Leninist vision. This ensured that Stalin's wartime cooperation with the West would last only as long as it was expedient and served Stalin's interests from resistance to Adolf Hitler and the German Wehrmacht, to securing a Soviet sphere in postwar Eastern Europe, and to guiding relations with the Western European communist parties for eventual communist expansion beyond the Eastern Europe sphere. On the other hand, revisionist historians have usually stressed Stalin's preoccupation with his own security and therefore the security of the Soviet state with little more than an expedient commitment to the rhetoric of Marxist-Leninism during this period. The revisionist's Stalin is not the "Uncle Joe" of wartime American images; he has his bloody, repressive, suspicious nature from the 1930s through the postwar purges; but in applying a pragmatic mindset on Stalin, they played down or dismissed any ideological framework to Stalin's perspective. In the final analysis the revisionist's Stalin is focused on security and prepared for an enduring accommodation with the Western powers after the war.

Roberts is most persuasive in his analysis of Stalin's wartime leadership of Soviet resistance to Germany and his diplomatic maneuvering with Winston Churchill and Franklin D. Roosevelt. Roberts makes very effective use of Stalin's daily appointment schedule and other Soviet sources to challenge persuasively the post-1953 discrediting of Stalin's leadership of the Red Army's resistance. The author does not defend Stalin against all criticism or deny his unyielding ruthlessness, especially in 1941-1942 towards Red

Army leaders, and with respect to Soviet soldiers who retreated in the face of the Wehrmacht's strategic offensive in this period and climatic battles at Stalingrad and Kursk. Roberts depicts Stalin as a product of Soviet offensive doctrine and preoccupied with stopping Hitler after June 22 1941. Roberts provides enough operational detail to support his thesis that Stalin's wartime leadership was indispensable, even more so than the other Big Three leaders, without losing the focus on Stalin and the transitions from the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact to the final wartime conferences with FDR and Harry Truman at Tehran, Yalta and Potsdam.

Speculation over who was more or less indispensable should not detract from the value of Roberts' evaluation and his ability to make a shift in emphasis from Stalin's military command to his supervision of wartime diplomacy with Churchill and FDR and preparations for shaping the final peace settlement. In the three chapters where diplomacy takes increasing precedence over climatic battles, Roberts reinforces existing assessments of Stalin as focused on the preparation of positions that would establish a Soviet sphere in Eastern Europe, regain Russian territories lost in the East and West reaching back to the Russo-Japanese war of 1905, and the acquisition of new territorial and strategic positions whenever possible on both fronts such as access to the Dardanelles, bases in Turkey, and a colony in the Mediterranean. The destruction of German and Japanese power remained a key consideration in Stalin's planning. Roberts also confirms Stalin's negotiating style. At Tehran and Yalta Stalin encouraged Churchill and FDR to show their cards on the major issues and responded to them by collecting their concession chips from the table and readily agreeing on what appeared to be less important Soviet concerns such as the Yalta Declaration on Liberated Europe or the occupation of Italy. Stalin continued his successful manipulation that he had earlier practiced in using the absence of an Allied second front in Europe in pressing Churchill and FDR to accede to the primacy of the Soviet role in defeating Nazi Germany and, thereby, the legitimacy of Soviet demands.

When Roberts moves the origins of the Cold War, the ground becomes more contested. With less than a hundred pages on Stalin's leadership from 1945 through the Korean War to 1953, Roberts necessarily has less space and fewer new documents to offer a significantly new assessment of Stalin's contribution to this conflict. Roberts' central thesis is that Stalin did not want a Cold War, tried to work out disagreements with the Western powers over Poland, Eastern Europe, Iran, and Germany, and only when the Western powers launched the Marshall Plan for the recovery of Western Europe did Stalin abandon cooperation, revive the Cominform, launch Western European and U.S. communist party resistance to Western policies, and slam the door on Winston Churchill's Iron Curtain. Roberts does move beyond this standard revisionist view from the late 1960s to a repeated affirmation that "Stalin's own actions and ambitions did contribute to the outbreak of the cold war ... [since] Stalin was determined to establish a Soviet sphere of influence in the states that bordered European Russia ... [and] Stalin had visions of a people's democratic Europe—a Europe of left-wing regimes under Soviet and communist influence." (pp. 24-25).

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Roberts grants some degree of primacy to Stalin's security concerns as the main short-term Soviet objective, and, consequently, floats the possibility of avoiding the Cold War if only the Western powers had recognized Stalin's priorities and backed off on securing at least the part of Germany they occupied and the rest of Western Europe against Stalin's more long range ideological and political expectations. As Roberts concludes, the Cold War resulted from "the political limitations of his [Stalin's] dictatorial regime. But it also occurred because western politicians ... were unable to see that beyond the alleged communist threat was an opportunity to arrive at a postwar settlement that could have averted the cold war...." (p. 374).

What confirms the strength of Roberts' credibility as a historian on this most debatable issue is that he does not present only a lawyer-like advocacy for this perspective. Instead, throughout the study Roberts presents enough quotations from Stalin's comments or directives in primary sources to suggest the opposite assessment of Stalin: that his ideological preconceptions and expectations were such that the Western powers were wise to shut the door whenever possible on Stalin even at the cost of precipitating the ensuing Cold War in Europe with Germany at the core.

Roberts first addresses the question of Stalin's objectives in his chapter on the "Unholy Alliance: Stalin's Pact with Hitler". In quoting from Comintern leader Georgi Dimitrov's diary on September 7, 1939, Roberts raises the war-revolution thesis as Stalin discusses the benefits of a war among the capitalist countries in which they weaken each other and "we can maneuver, pit one side against the other to set them fighting with each other as fiercely as possible." (p. 36) Although Roberts suggests that Stalin may have been rationalizing to Dimitrov regarding the recent abandonment of anti-Nazi policy, the public polestar of Soviet policy since 1933, the author does suggest that "underlying Stalin's calculations about the Nazi-Soviet pact was a fundamentalist vision of the inevitability of capitalist crises and imperialist wars," even if Stalin gave priority to defense and avoidance of war with Germany. (p. 38)

Roberts returns to this theme at several points in his study as Stalin's focus on stopping Hitler shifts to the wartime negotiations with Churchill and Roosevelt. Despite his mastery of the literature, Roberts declines to use the imperial-revolutionary paradigm on Stalin that Vlad Zubok and Constantine Pleshakov developed in *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War*. These authors recognized, as does Roberts, that Stalin retained communist political and ideological perspectives and at the same time strove to achieve imperial interests. What Roberts discusses in many ways provides additional support for the usefulness of this paradigm. The abolition of the Communist International in May 1943 illustrates how Roberts discusses both sides of the paradigm. (pp. 168-174) First, Stalin clearly viewed the international communist parties as his parties and wanted them to act more as national parties pursuing tactics and strategies relevant to their national situations in the latter stages of the war and postwar situation. Although Roberts places the timing for the abolition of the Comintern in the context of the crisis over the Katyn forest massacre and Stalin's desire to bolster the position of the Polish communist party as a legitimate

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nationalist force, he clearly depicts Stalin as integrating his diplomatic and communist considerations.

Roberts continues with this perspective through the Tehran and Yalta conferences and into the postwar maneuvering and negotiations. The author views Stalin as pleased with his relations with Churchill and FDR as long as he achieved his major strategic objectives with respect to Germany, the second front issue, and a sphere in Eastern Europe. Roberts depicts Stalin as prepared to accept a Western sphere in the short run but "Stalin's emergent goals were political and ideological as well as strategic. The Europe that the Soviet leader sought to dominate would be a continent transformed by social and economic upheavals and by communist political advance." Noting a fundamental divergence between the views of Western leaders and Stalin's "emergent vision of a radical transformation of European politics," Roberts highlights the beginnings of the disagreements that would lead to the Cold War in Europe (p. 190) and retains his perspective through the Yalta conference and into the negotiations with the new administration of Harry Truman. (pp. 222, 231, 236-237, 253, 291-292)

In his commendable effort to stick with the available primary sources on Stalin and his advisers, Roberts has given less consideration to the impact of historical and emotional factors that enter into the perspectives on both sides when disagreements after the war came to the forefront. Roberts does emphasize Stalin's and the Soviet sense that they were receiving insufficient recognition for their superior sacrifices in the defeat of Hitler and inadequate respect as a great power as the U.S. complained about the Soviet sphere in Eastern Europe, starting with the composition of the Polish government, then moving to Romania and Bulgaria and shifting to focus most critically on Germany. (p. 300) However, Roberts offers little discussion of how Stalin's experiences with the Western powers may have affected his perceptions, particularly the maneuverings in the thirties culminating in the failure to negotiate an alliance against Hitler. On the other side, Roberts also gives little recognition to Western, particularly American perceptions of Stalin, his domestic policies in the thirties, and diplomatic maneuvers in 1939-1941. These perceptions and emotional attitudes which become intensely critical and emotional by 1940 were not wiped clean by the wartime cooperation. When friction developed in 1945-1947, these attitudes made it very difficult to achieve the type of accommodation that Stalin wanted in the short-run and that Roberts wishes had occurred to head off a full-blown Cold War.

The absence of a consideration of these factors weakens Robert's final chapters on the Cold War. Roberts correctly stresses Stalin's reaction of abandoning his hopes for cooperation with the West in response to the Marshall plan, but he does not provide a persuasive analysis of why. Since the U.S. backed off on pressuring Stalin on the Eastern European sphere, Germany clearly was a central issue. When Stalin rejected the U.S. offer of a treaty on the disarmament and demilitarization of Germany, the plan proposed by Secretary of State James Byrnes in April 1946, and declined to participate in the Marshall Plan, Roberts suggests at various points that Stalin did not want to lose the opportunity to have influence in all of Germany, not just the Soviet zone, and that the Marshall Plan appeared as a threat

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to the Eastern European sphere. (pp. 314-319, 347, 352-355) Roberts does not point out that by unleashing his communist parties in Italy and France and elsewhere against approval of the Marshall Plan, Stalin confirmed both Roberts' perspective on Stalin's long-range communist and ideological hopes and the U.S. conclusion that Stalin was sufficiently unreliable and dangerous with respect to Germany and Western Europe that the U.S. had to bolster in a number of ways its Western allies and what became West Germany.

It should be emphasized that Roberts' latest work is the most impressive English language source on Stalin's wartime leadership and very professional in the way that the author provides primary evidence on both sides of the challenging quest to determine what Stalin was after with respect to the Western powers.

COMMONSENSE STALIN

As every autocrat, Joseph Stalin posed as a Renaissance man, passing on his judgment on Goethe, Dostoyevsky, Eisenstein, city planning, genetics, crops, gardens, cars, and even linguistics, but the only *métier* he practiced seriously was that of a general (dictator or mass murderer is not an occupation). Basically, that's what Geoffrey Roberts' *Stalin's Wars* is about – Stalin as a warlord. The fruits of wars the dictator fought for most of his life constitute his real legacy, so books like Roberts' are highly relevant, despite the multi-volume Staliniana accumulated in the libraries over the past fifty years.

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To the main point of the book. Roberts admits that he wrote it with an *über* task in mind. "This book," he says, "has tried to show that the contemporaneous perception of Stalin's war leadership was closer to the truth of the matter than many of the layers of historical interpretation that followed." (p. 373) The contemporaneous perception of Stalin's war leadership is also defined by Roberts as "commonsense," and I, personally, like the term, though not sure whether I would've used it myself. So what is the "commonsense" Stalin as a war leader?

Roberts calls Stalin's presence "crucial" for the victory and the generalissimo himself a "great war leader not because he had won but because he had done so much to achieve victory." (p. 373) With a certain degree of moral discomfort, I suppose I have to agree on both accounts, though the adjective "great" is, perhaps, a bit excessive. Stalin was a pretty *good* wartime leader. Looking at the first ten days of World War Two on the Eastern Front, from June 22, 1941 and on, as I did in my book, two things about Stalin's reaction shock a writer: first, his totally inept response to the German attack (the man ordered a counterstrike, in other words, a mass murder of his own troops guaranteeing an easy victory in the borderland for the Germans) and then the pace and nature of Stalin's recovery about ten days later. Recovery or even transfiguration (the theological tinge of the term is perhaps appropriate for someone deemed a living god). By the end of 1941, the wartime Stalin does something the pre-war Stalin loathed: he delegates power and, more, he delegates power to the generals, potential breeders of Bonapartism, the bogymen of his whole political life. Furthermore, after the war, Stalin, who had been in the habit of first using people and then liquidating them (two secret police czars shot within a few years), did not purge the young and vigorous marshals (even Georgy Zhukov, the biggest challenge of all, got away with a slap on the wrist - a humiliating low-grade appointment, but still an appointment, not an anonymous grave). So – yes, Stalin did grow into a good commander-

in-chief - unlike Hitler, his failed nemesis, who took a journey in the opposite direction over the same war.

One could call Roberts' book an inspiring exercise in revisionism – a term well known to the Cold War historians, of course. He emphatically disagrees with the “cold war polemicists” who say that “Stalin’s victory over Hitler should rather be seen as a defeat for the half of Europe that became subsumed under his totalitarian rule.” (p. 373) It is worth noting that this point of view is far from having been limited to the Cold War eon and is often present in media reports from and about Eastern Europe. Despite the horrific war crimes of the Red Army on Polish, German, or Austrian soil (as Roberts informs us, at least 70,000 rapes in Vienna only (p. 263)), Stalin’s troops defeated the most inhumane regime in history, and as for the introduction of Communism to Eastern Europe, the picture was very complicated, as, even in its Stalinist version, Communism had quite a bit of grass-root support in countries like Poland and Czechoslovakia.

Roberts also deplors “the more subtle downgrading” of Stalin by authors who “sidelined the strategic importance of the Soviet-German conflict and reduced its role in the overall narrative of the Second World War.” True -- with all due respect, Iwo Jima was not a Stalingrad.

Stalin's Wars is likely to become popular with instructors teaching courses in 20th century history, as the book covers the most consequential Soviet story – that of World War II and the early, untamed, Cold War, treating the two conflicts as parts of a yet bigger paradigm, which they, likely, were.

The book is smartly organized; pay attention to the fact that the chronology of major events is placed before the body of the text, in a truly user-friendly way, despite the deplorable tradition in publishing of sticking it somewhere between the last page of the index and the dust jacket. The maps, absolutely crucial in a military history book, are numerous, detailed and appropriately easy to read. Another thing making Geoffrey Roberts' book attractive is the appealing voice. Giving the estimates for sexual assaults of the Red Army soldiers on the occupied European territories, Roberts reminds us that Berlin in 1945 “was largely a city of women” (p.263) – a detail that makes war history disturbingly graphic; as it, of course, should be.

So – has the book succeeded in its mission to reconstruct the “commonsense Stalin” as a war leader? Roberts' argument would've been much stronger had he explored Stalin's participation in the Civil War in Russia and the Red Army's 1920 Poland campaign, where Stalin, not exactly a young man, was a young commissar. But, of course, if facts can be verified, the assembly of them, which is, strictly speaking, history proper, is subject to perennial interpretation. It is stunning how looking at the same set of evidence people can pronounce different verdicts on the same situation or person involved. *Stalin's Wars* is very much about that paradox, and that alone is already an accomplishment.

Stalin's Wars Roundtable

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A Soviet joke from the late 1950s. "What do you think of Stalin's cult of personality?"
"Well, the cult was there for sure, but so was the personality."

In this detailed work covering Stalin's role in the direction of diplomacy and military affairs in World War II and the Cold War until his death in 1953, Geoffrey Roberts utilized a number of newly accessible unpublished sources as well as considerable published material. Perhaps the most important new source used to shed light on disputed issues is the record of Stalin's daily appointments, a record that enables the author to set straight assertions in the changing memoirs of Soviet military leaders. The account of Stalin's developing relationship with the generals of the Red Army is fair and in this reviewer's opinion the most balanced one currently available. It is also clear that the author's emphasis on Stalin's real, not feigned, concern about a revived German threat to the Soviet Union is entirely believable. While Roberts correctly stresses the Soviet interest in gaining a trusteeship over Tripolitania, the western portion of the Italian colony of Libya, he simply omits any reference to Stalin's demand for a base at the Greek port of Dedeagatch (Alexandroupolis) on the north coast of the Aegean.

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This omission of a significant element in Stalin's expansionist concepts may be related to other strange omissions and errors where geography enters the picture. There is no explanation why Stalin gave Petsamo back to Finland after the Red Army occupied it in the Winter War – but was insistent on annexing it at least from December, 1941, on. The whole extraordinary story of the portion of Lithuania (around Mariampole) that Germany was to have according to the German-Soviet agreement of September 1939, its seizure by the Soviets in 1940, and its purchase from Germany for the sum the United States had paid for Alaska is not mentioned anywhere. Similarly, there is no reference to Stalin's shift on the future of East Prussia from originally wanting only the city of Tilsit (now Sovietsk) to demanding that the northern half of East Prussia to be annexed to the Russian Federation rather than the Lithuanian SSR, with Poland to be compensated by the German city of Stettin instead of Königsberg. At several places in the text Galicia is retroactively transferred from the Habsburg to the Romanov empire in the pre-World War I era. The fiftieth anniversary of the Hungarian uprising might have suggested to the author another look at his assertion that the Carpathian Ukraine had no great strategic importance (p. 224). In fact it provided

the Soviet Union with a border on Hungary and control of the passes in the Carpathian mountains.

The account of the Nazi-Soviet Pact of 1939 offered here has little relation to reality. It seems unfortunate that Roberts is so taken by what he imagines to have been Stalin's brilliance that he never quite grasps the origins, nature, and effects of Stalin's determined refusal to accept superb intelligence on the German plan to invade the Soviet Union in 1941 as well as the direction of Germany's main effort in 1942. There is no recognition of the enormous impact of the German conduct in the East in World War II as contrasted with World War I on cohesion in the Soviet army and civilian population. Roberts never comments on Stalin's inability to comprehend any aspect of the war at sea. Did the Soviet leader seriously expect the Allied ships he had helped the Germans sink to jump up from the bottom of the oceans to carry supplies to the Soviet Union once it had been attacked?

This leads to a fundamental weakness in the book as a whole. Roberts never recognizes that Stalin vastly preferred an alliance with Germany to the one with Britain and the United States that he found himself shoved into by the Germans. The latter could have a base on Soviet territory; the Western Allies could not. The Germans could be provided with an icebreaker so that a German warship could pass north of Siberia into the Pacific to sink Allied ships; but planes of the Western Allied could not be allowed to land on Soviet airfields when supplying the Polish uprising in Warsaw. In this dramatic event as in all others during the war, in the immediate postwar period, and during the Cold War, Stalin was always right, and the fault in controversies then and later was invariably with Britain and the United States. If Stalin was as interested in a continued alignment with the West as the author imagines, why were German prisoners liberated from the Poles in 1939 treated so much better than British and American prisoners liberated from the Germans in 1945? All Soviet attempts at a separate peace with Germany are dismissed by Roberts without serious engagement of the relevant literature. It is, however, only by recognizing that Stalin was projecting his own policy of hoping for such an arrangement onto others that one can explain his almost idiotic obsession with imaginary efforts of Winston Churchill in that direction (pp. 141-42).

The list of dubious assertions and interpretations could be continued. There is something hilarious about Stalin's alleged fear of an invasion eastwards by NATO at a time when all NATO planning, as Soviet espionage knew, was based until well into the 1950's on an evacuation of all forces from the continent in case of a war with a mobilization to follow for a repeat of June 1944 to liberate Western Europe, this time from the Red Army.

Roberts informs his readers in the Preface that Churchill, Hitler, Mussolini, and Roosevelt "were all replaceable as warlords, but not Stalin." This reader wonders whether another leader could have held the British together in their ordeal in 1940, whether another German would have insisted on a conduct of the war guaranteed to make Stalin look benign, whether another Italian would have taken Italy into the war at all, and whether another leader could have prepared the American people for war and then had them accept

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a Germany-First strategy when most preferred a Japan-First strategy? And is it not conceivable that another Soviet leader might have refrained from decapitating the Red Army in the years when war loomed and subsequently paid attention to copies of the German invasion plan? Is it really inconceivable that another Soviet leader might have recognized that if the Soviet Union assisted the Germans in driving the Allies from the continent first in the North, then in the West, and finally in the South it would be left alone with them in the East, and that thereafter the same bodies of water that shielded Britain and the United States from German arms would shield Germany from the arms of Britain and the United States? Roberts has provided his readers with some interesting new materials, often quoting important documents at length, but his picture of Stalin as almost invariably wise and correct is not convincing.

Review by Vladislav Zubok, Temple University

Goeffrey Roberts' *Stalin's Wars* is a highly uneven book. It contains a very provocative thesis ("rehabilitating" Stalin as a great statesman), a significant amount of new sources, and a gap between the claim and the sources.

The book is not without merits. It fills an extremely important niche in the historiography, covering the period from the Nazi-Soviet pact to the Korean war. I can only applaud treating World War II and the early phases of the cold war as a continuum. In the historiography divided artificially into the "history of World War II" and "cold war history" this book is a marvelous exception. Also, Roberts sums up impressive amount of new archival evidence: diaries, and all kinds of other sources, Western and Soviet that have been painstakingly collected by other researchers, including Mark Kramer and his Harvard Project on Cold War Studies, the National Security Archive, and the Cold War International History Project (CWIHP) in Washington, D.C.¹ Most of the Russian new evidence has been already published in Russian, yet Roberts is one of the first scholars who incorporates it into Western historiography.

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Among the new sources used in the book are the documents on Stalin's interaction with Churchill and Roosevelt during the war collected by Oleg Rzheshhevsky (they also appeared in English); some diaries and recollections, among them by the Minister of Tank Industry Vyacheslav Malyshev (published in the Moscow archival journal *Istochnik*) and by the secretary of the Council of Ministers Yakov Chadaev (published by G.A.Kumanev in his 1991 book *At Stalin's Side* in Russian). Roberts also uses the collection of intelligence reports "1941," including the reports to Stalin from the GRU head Filip Golikov on the eve of the German attack. The author also used the archival documents on Soviet policies in Eastern Europe in the 1940s, collected by Galina Murashko and her collaborators; the volumes on Soviet policies in Germany collected by Johan Laufer and Georgy Kynin; Georgy Dimitrov's diary (it was published in English), and the classified journal "Voprosi vneshnei

¹ [Ed. Note] Harvard Project on Cold War Studies, <http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~hpcws/>; the National Security Archive, <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/>; and CWIHP, http://www.wilsoncenter.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=topics.home&topic_id=1409.

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politiki" published in 1944-47 by the Central Committee Department for Foreign Policy Information (the staff of the disbanded Comintern).

At the same time, there are significant gaps in the evidence used by Roberts. Some of them I will point out in the review below.

The book illustrates the adage: nothing attracts so much attention as a wrong thesis. Roberts dons the mantle of the devil's advocate (sometimes a fruitful exercise) but he is overzealous in doing it (see the similar observation was voiced also by Eric Lohr, American University, and Steven A. Barnes, George Mason University, during the discussion at the Cold War International History Project, April 18, 2007).² His *a priori* position is defending Stalin against his attackers but this defense is based on insufficient and sometimes selective evidence. His conclusions are often tenuous, and there are a sufficient number of glib statements that compromise the whole exercise.

First thesis. Without Stalin and the state he ran with iron hand, Hitler would have won the war. I am not a historian of World War II but I was surprised to read Roberts citing from the volume of documents "1941" on Soviet intelligence to Stalin on the eve of the Nazi invasion: "On the night of 21-22 June this vast force [Soviet army - VZ] was put on alert and warned to expect a surprise attack by the Germans." And it is quite astonishing to read on p. 70: "...the German surprise attack on 22 June 1941 surprised no one, not even Stalin." Perhaps I overlooked some revolutionary scoops on this point, but what I know is the following: Stalin did not allow the Soviet military to return fire for hours after *Barbarossa* started because he did not expect the German invasion. Perhaps Zhukov and a number of the military expected the war, but not Stalin. And 200 million Soviet citizens experienced such a strong shock that it would continue to shape the Soviet mentality for the next several decades through the Cold War. The book, incidentally, ignores the explanations that Mikhail Milstein, a GRU veteran (one of Golikov's deputies there) gave to the language of the GRU reports before June 22. Stalin mistrusted all the GRU spies, so Golikov had to resort to a trick: he reported on the facts of German preparations but added (to avoid Stalin's wrath) some phrases about their "unreliable" provenance.

On p. 107 Roberts has a caption: "Stalin saves Moscow." Although Stalin's measures ended the October 16 panic in the city, Zhukov's role and other factors (the Wehrmacht's overreach, dropping temperatures, etc.) helped to save Moscow more than Stalin's terror. A few pages down Roberts admits that "it is impossible to assess with any degree of accuracy the contribution Stalin's intervention made to Soviet success in the battle of Moscow..." (p. 111) Why then make such a sweeping claim?

Second thesis. Stalin worked hard to make the Grand Alliance a success and wanted to see it continue after the war. Attempting to interpret Stalin's mind-frame at the end of World

² [Ed. Note] A video of this event is CWIHP event is available, via http://www.wilsoncenter.org/index.cfm?topic_id=1409&fuseaction=topics.event_summary&event_id=224842, accessed 21 July 2007.

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War II, Roberts borrows a lot from the original research of Russian historian Vladimir Pechatnov who analyzed the 1943-45 internal memos on the desirable post-war settlements written by Litvinov and Maisky, as well as the Soviet ambassador in Washington Andrei Gromyko. Pechatnov concludes that these authors, especially Litvinov and Maisky, made considerable mistakes in their forecasts: they believed in the inevitability of the British-American contradictions after the war and completely missed the new global role of the United States (I made a similar conclusion in my book with Pleshakov in 1996). Also, the Soviet planners assumed that a confrontation between the Western powers and the USSR in Europe and the Balkans could be avoided by making “amicable agreements” on spheres of influence and keeping these spheres of influence “open.” Pechatnov admits that Stalin and Molotov implemented some elements from Maisky’s and Litvinov’s forecasts and proposals but does specify which ones they rejected and why. (Vladimir Pechatnov, *Stalin, Ruzvelt, Truman: SSSR i SShA v 1940khgg. Dokumentalnie ocherki*. Moscow: Terra, 2006, 254-256)

Roberts goes beyond Pechatnov’s propositions. He claims that all three authors operated within the sphere of the permissible, trying to deduce what was on Stalin’s mind: “In short, it is reasonable to assume that the speculations of Gromyko, Litvinov, and Maiskii on the shape of the postwar world were not idiosyncratic but reflected the language and terms of the internal discourse on foreign policy and international relations that was taking place at the highest levels of decision-making.” (p. 234) Knowing what we know about Maisky and Litvinov, it is more plausible to suggest that both of them hoped to influence Stalin with their forecasts and suggestions, and to indicate to the suspicious dictator any room for diplomacy and negotiations. If so, they failed completely. Other new sources not used by Roberts (portions of Maisky’s diary published in Kynin-Laufer volumes “USSR and the German Question” and especially Litvinov’s conversation with CBS correspondent in Moscow Richard C. Hottelet on June 18, 1946) indicate the frustration of these planners at their inability to impress Stalin with their conclusions and logic.

Thesis Three. Stalin did not want to Sovietize Eastern Europe and began to do so only after the breakout of the Cold War. Roberts describes Stalin’s “stop on the Vistula” during the Warsaw uprising of 1944 as dictated by purely military motives. While there were plenty of military reasons to make a stop, it was also quite obvious that Stalin was irritated by the Western attempts to help the Home Army. Roberts ignores new evidence that has been available for a long time (on the SMERSH activities in Poland, Nikita Petrov’s monograph on Ivan Serov) on the efforts of the Soviet secret police to eradicate the Polish anti-communist anti-Russian underground. Roberts quotes (from T. Volokitina, T. Islamov, G. Murashko, A. Noskova, i.a., eds., *Vostochnaia Evropa v dokumentakh rossiiskikh arkhivov*, vol. 1, 1944-1948 (Moscow-Novosibirsk: Sibirsky khronograf, 1997) and vol. 2, 1949-1953 (Moscow-Novosibirsk: Sibirsky khronograf, 1998) as well as from Dimitrov’s diary) Stalin talking to the Yugoslavs about “Slavophilism” and the consolidation of the Slavic people of Europe under the Soviet wing against a possible German menace. He also quotes Stalin speaking about factions of capitalists; “We are currently allied with one faction against the other, but in the future we will be allied against the first faction of capitalists, too.” Roberts’

interpretation: "What was really on Stalin's mind was the long-term German threat and the need for Slavic unity to confront it." There are, however, different interpretations (e.g. by Leonid Gibiansky and Norman Naimark) that do not give much credit to Stalin's "Slavophilism." The bulk of the evidence in Murashko's volume and Dimitrov's diary shows Stalin cynically manipulating historical, nationalist, and other motives and images in the name of consolidating a Soviet *exclusive* sphere of influence in Central and Eastern Europe, as well as in the Balkans.

Roberts repeats (with variations) in his book that "Stalin did not see this ideological project [the gradual spread of communism in Europe] as incompatible with prolonged postwar collaboration with his partners in the Grand Alliance, including an inevitable division of interests across the globe." (p. 25 with reference to the works of Pechatnov, Silvio Pons, Norman Naimark, and Eduard Mark). Roberts also concludes: "ultimately Stalin's radical change of strategy and tactics in the region was prompted by the outbreak of the cold war in 1947" (p. 253). There is a big division and debate between Western and Russian scholars about the degree of Sovietization of Central and Eastern Europe in 1945-47 and, most importantly, if it was just the Cold War (the Marshall Plan) that "forced" Stalin to start this Sovietization or it was the inner logic of Soviet policies in this region. One wishes that Roberts engaged more with the other side in this debate. What about Stalin's other admissions, the most famous of which is the one recorded by Milovan Djilas that suggests Stalin's ideological beliefs in the inevitability of conflict with capitalism? And what about Molotov's later observations to Chuev: "We had to consolidate what had been conquered. The [Eastern] part of Germany had to be transformed into our Socialist Germany...."? Roberts does not evaluate this evidence.

Roberts and I are in agreement that the cold war was not "Stalin's preferred choice" (p. 253). Yet, I do not subscribe to Roberts' conclusion that "Stalin mistakenly projected his own rationality and calculations on the others," i.e. the Western powers. Does Roberts imply that Truman, Churchill, Byrnes, Marshall, and their Western European partners acted "irrationally" when they began to practice containment of Stalin's USSR, advanced the Marshall Plan and began to organize the separate West Germany? Does it mean that Stalin who had made one mistake of trusting Hitler, made another similar mistake in trusting the Western allies? Stalin the Gullible? Unfortunately, there is no evidence for this beside some of Stalin's self-serving rhetoric to foreigners (on this later).

The absence of Stalin's ideological mind-frame in the book is striking. In fact, Stalin comes out as a completely rational and pragmatic leader, in a sense more pragmatic than the Western politicians who dealt with him. Also, even more surprisingly, Roberts gives more credit to "Stalin's story" than to the "story" related by Truman, Churchill, and other Western statesmen. For instance, he concludes that, contrary to Truman's assertion, an "acerbic exchange" between him with Molotov on April 23, 1945 – on Soviet violations of Yalta's Declaration of Liberated Europe in Poland - never took place. Indeed, neither the American nor the Soviet record contains the version told by Truman's memoirs. At the same time Roberts forgets to cite the valuable testimony of Oleg Troyanovsky who heard

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from Andrei Gromyko how it happened. According to Gromyko (who omitted this in his memoirs), Truman “immediately began to attack.” Molotov was taken by surprise and seemed disoriented. He was prepared to respond to Truman’s tirade, but the President abruptly ended the meeting. Molotov was “visibly worried. He could foresee that Truman’s behavior might evoke a very negative reaction in Moscow” and had reason to think that “Stalin might put responsibility for what happened on his shoulders.” When Molotov and Gromyko returned to the Soviet embassy, they together spent a lot of time writing a telegram to Stalin where the unpleasant end of the conversation was obfuscated. (Oleg Troyanovsky, *Cherez gody i rasstoiania*. Moscow: Vagrius, 1997, pp. 129-130). It is strange that Roberts ignores this evidence.

Roberts’ description of Stalin’s policy in Germany in 1945-52 draws on the notion that Stalin had “hopes” that the entire Germany would turn after the war into a democratic, anti-fascist country. The new evidence (not used by Roberts) about the discussion of the proposal of James Byrnes to demilitarize Germany for 20 years, however, reveals that Stalin, as well as his entourage, did not want to withdraw Soviet troops from East Germany under any circumstances. It is more plausible to suggest that Stalin was determined to occupy East Germany indefinitely – but he recognized (in fact, overestimated) the power of German nationalism (he also did the same in the case of Japan) and wanted to direct the surmised German nationalistic fervor against the Western powers in a competition for “German soul.”

Thesis Four. Stalin had a reasonable and limited policy ambitions after the war that the West failed to satisfy. In this vein, Stalin’s probes in Turkey and Iran were also reasonable and limited. Roberts writes: “Soviet Black Sea bases were close to Stalin’s Georgian heart and, as always, he accorded high priority to control of vital economic resources such as oil.” (p. 311) He does not cite, however, the plethora of new sources on the Iranian crisis, produced by Jamil Hasanli (published recently in English but available in Russian since 2004). There is no “Georgian heart” to be found there. This evidence shows that in Iran Stalin planned to obtain oil concessions and perhaps even create a puppet “Iranian Azerbaijan” state, relying on the force of the Red Army, the secret police, and the power of regional ethnic separatism. In Turkey, as the Armenian and Georgian archival sources indicate (cited in another book by Hasanli), Stalin used blatant pressure in combination with the “Armenian card,” i.e. the repatriation of the Armenians to Soviet Armenia, in expectation that the United States would not object. In the end, even Stalin’s lieutenant Vyacheslav Molotov believed that the pressure on Turkey and Iran was unreasonable, and Stalin was unnecessary provocative.

Had Stalin obtained, with the consent of the Western allies, access to the Iranian oil reserves and to the Mediterranean, would the Soviet Union have become the “status quo” power, responsible and reliable? The book does not discuss this key issue. Yet, given the nature of the Stalinist regime the answer seems apparent.

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Thesis Five. Stalin's own identity as a Soviet patriot and Russian nationalist. It would be an ironic posthumous triumph for Stalin to grant him the title of the most successful Russian nationalist. In the chapter on the Soviet home front Roberts cites Elena Zubkova's book (*Russia after the War: Hopes, Illusions, and Disappointments, 1945-1957*. Armonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 1998.) – but he does it selectively, focusing on her conclusions and evidence that many war veterans and Soviet officials identified themselves with Stalin's irritation and anger at Churchill and Western politicians. In fact, as other sources demonstrate, Stalin was afraid of genuine Russian nationalism (hence, the Leningrad affair in 1949-50). He misused and manipulated it during the war and after it, just like he used and manipulated German nationalism, Georgian, Azeri, Ukrainian, etc. Finally, one simply cannot avoid the major issue of the cost of the war for Russians. As a number of war historians agree, this cost was to a great extent Stalin's fault, as well as Hitler's.

Thesis Six. Stalin mellowed after the War, he did not have a great terror, and actually, the Thaw and “de-Stalinization” began during the last years of Stalin's life. Here Roberts adopts the conclusions from the recent book by Yoram Gorfitsky and Oleg Khlevniuk (*Cold Peace: Stalin and the Soviet Ruling Circle, 1945-1953*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.) Yet, he pushes the envelope too far. He writes: “Stalin was actively rethinking the universal validity of the Soviet model of revolution and socialism” (249). The whole dynamics inside the communist camp were based on the assumption that Stalin was always right and the Soviet experience was superior to any other revolutionary experience. Also, the book stands on the erroneous thesis that Stalinist repressions stopped during the war and “returned” only after its end (p. 336). Roberts uses the sources on the postwar terror quite selectively, and obfuscates some facts on repressions that are proven beyond doubt. For instance, the Yiddish actor Solomon Mikhoels in Roberts' book was killed in 1948 “possibly at the hands of the Soviet security forces.” (p.338) This “possibly” should have not been used, given the documentary evidence on Stalin's personal involvement in Mikhoels' murder and the MGB-MVD's furious crackdown against the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee and its leadership. Roberts' presentation of the evidence on Stalin's anti-Semitic campaign in 1949-53 is a bit confusing. In citing Malyshev's diary, December 1, 1952, he writes that for Stalin “every Jew-Nationalist” was the enemy, i.e. not Jews, but just “Jews-Nationalists.” The Russian original is ambiguous and can be equally translated: “Any Jew is a nationalist and an agent of American intelligence.” (I use the working translation of the Cold War International History Project). The date when the USSR broke diplomatic relations with Israel is wrong in the book (1952). This happened January 1953, in the wake of the Pravda's publication on the “Kremlin doctors.” At the same time, Roberts later in the book writes that “all Jews were politically suspect because of their race unless proven otherwise.” (p. 341)

A final observation on the methodology of reading Soviet sources. Roberts acts on the best historian's instincts when he combines the public sources, such as *Pravda* articles, the discussions of the Big Three, etc., with new evidence from the secret archives. Yet, his agenda narrows his view of these sources. He uses sources to illustrate his *a priori* theses, instead of looking at the sources as a historian, probing for their subtle and ambiguous

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context, looking beyond what was recorded towards what was omitted. As some who knew Stalin remembered: Stalin liked secrecy, and for him, if two people knew a secret, it meant it was no longer a secret. As a result, even Stalin's archive does not reveal us most intimate thoughts of the *Vozhd*. In the end, the book's main fault is that it gives Stalin too much credit of trust. Roberts seems to assume that whatever Stalin said and wrote, publicly or secretly, was true – in other words, that Stalin really *meant* it. We know how many people perished because they trusted Stalin's words, and took them at a face value. Taking Stalin's *words* as facts is a methodological approach for Roberts. For me it is a bizarre misunderstanding of Stalin's personality, and the nature of his immense power.

Stalin's Wars Roundtable

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Author's Response by Geoffrey Roberts, Department of History, University College Cork, Ireland

It is a great honour and privilege for *Stalin's Wars* to be reviewed by such a distinguished group of scholars. I would like to thank Diane Labrosse and H-Diplo for organising the roundtable and, especially, Warren Kimball for hosting and chairing the discussion. I am very pleased to have the opportunity to comment on such a range of responses to *Stalin's Wars*, particularly since the book has proved even more controversial than I imagined. I don't propose to answer every point raised by the reviewers; rather, I will try to highlight some general issues about my methods and findings. Doubtless I will have the opportunity to deal with outstanding matters as the H-Diplo discussion of the book develops.

Professor **Geoffrey Roberts** teaches History and International Relations at University College Cork, Ireland. His books include: *The Unholy Alliance: Stalin's Pact with Hitler (1989)*; *The Soviet Union and the Origins of the Second World War (1995)*; *The Soviet Union in World Politics, 1945-1991 (1998)*; and *Victory at Stalingrad: The Battle That Changed History (2002)*.

The first and most important point to make is that I am not trying to rehabilitate Stalin. I do not believe that Stalin was a great statesman. I think he was criminally responsible for the deaths of millions of innocent people. My book is full of evidence - from beginning to end - of the mass repressions of the Stalin era, not least during the war itself. I do think that Stalin was a great war leader (or at least a pretty good one, as Constantine Pleshakov puts it) but this view of Stalin is not an *a priori* thesis. It is the result of my engagement with the evidence on Stalin's warlordship, particularly the new materials and researches of the last 10-15 years. During the course of my research I came to the conclusion that cold war propaganda and the polemics of destalinisation had contributed to a distortion of our perception of Stalin's war leadership and that many of the traditional criticisms of his wartime role were either wrong or misconceived. One of my aims is to clear the way for a more balanced critique of Stalin - one that recognises the important strengths as well as the real weaknesses of his wartime leadership. An example of my approach is the critique I make of Stalin's role in relation to the disaster of 22 June 1941. Unlike Vladislav Zubok and Gerhard Weinberg I do not think that Stalin's handling of the intelligence warnings of a German surprise attack is the main issue. Sure, Stalin hoped, believed and calculated that Hitler would not attack in summer 1941. But the evidence from multiple intelligence sources (including that from his military intelligence chief, the much-maligned Golikov) was far too compelling for the possibility to be ruled out, even by Stalin. Rather, the salient point is that Stalin believed that even if the Germans did attack Soviet defences would hold and the Red Army would be able to launch its planned counter-offensives. Zubok says that "Stalin did not allow the Soviet military to return fire for hours after Barbarossa started because he did not expect a German attack." Actually, the Soviet high command, with Stalin's authorization, issued orders for fire to be returned only a couple of hours after the German attack. Soviet forces were, it is true, constrained from crossing the frontier without special authorization - but this order aimed at pre-empting Nazi propaganda claims that the Red Army had attacked first. More important was that

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just a few hours later the Red Army was ordered to implement long-laid plans for counter-offensive action, including deep strikes into enemy territory. It was during the course of this ill-conceived and ill-prepared counter-offensive that the Red Army suffered the most damage in the days following the German attack. It seems to me that it is Stalin's delusions about Soviet defenses and about the Red Army's offensive capabilities that should be at the centre of our critical attention, not the intelligence issue. This necessitates the exploration of a more complex scenario in which Stalin is not the only villain of the piece. Alongside Stalin's miscalculations must be placed the role of his generals, misconceived military doctrine, and the damage done by the Red Army's preparation and deployment for an offensive war with Germany

My second point is that the narrative in *Stalin's Wars* is, indeed, mainly from Stalin's point of view, quite often using his voice, either in direct quotation or paraphrase. However, the historical empathy required to tell such a story should not be mistaken for my political views and sympathies. Also, as Thomas Maddux notes, I present the most important evidence of Stalin's views in a way that facilitates different interpretations from my own. As Zubok says there are alternative interpretations, for example, of Stalin's statements to Bulgarian and Yugoslav communists in January 1945. In support of my own interpretation I would refer people to the full texts of these statements as printed in the book (p.236) and to my contextualization of them in my extensive analysis of the development of Stalin's Slavophilism during the war. At the same time I tried to ensure that the point of view of Stalin's British and American allies was fairly and accurately represented and I just don't recognise Weinberg's characterization of the book as "Stalin was always right, and the fault in controversies...was invariably with Britain and the United States." Again, I think it is a case of Weinberg failing to see that in place of the old critique of Stalin I propose a new one.

In telling Stalin's story I tried to deploy the full range of available sources on what he was thinking and doing, above all the new archives, documents and diaries that reveal what he said in confidential settings. Zubok thinks I give Stalin's words too much credence and that the Soviet dictator's love of secrecy means that even his private archive does not reveal his intimate thoughts. I agree – and say so in the book – that evidence of Stalin's innermost thinking and calculations is limited and problematic and his words are not to be taken at face value. But those words and how they connect to decision, action, and context are the best evidence we have of Stalin's beliefs and intentions and are certainly preferable to, for example, the tendentious, post hoc, second-hand reconstructions of memoirists. In this connection I am not impressed, for example, by Zubok's citation from Troyanovsky's memoirs of what Gromyko supposedly told him about what apparently happened at the famously abrasive meeting between Molotov and Truman in April 1945. Far better, it seems to me, to rely on the documentary evidence of both the Soviet and American contemporary records of the Truman-Molotov conversations. These show that while there was some tough talking between the two men there was nothing like the acerbic exchange recorded in cold war lore (see my article: "Sexing up the Cold War: New Evidence on the

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Molotov-Truman Talks of April 1945”, *Cold War History*, vol.4, no.3, April 2004).¹ Of course memoirs have their uses, and sometimes they are indispensable. I make a lot of use of them in *Stalin's Wars*, but, I hope, critically, and not as unquestioned authorities of fact or interpretation.

My third point concerns the book's location in the historical debate about the origins of the cold war. Maddux is right to characterise the book as a text both located in and transcending the revisionist tradition. Indeed, the book's distant origins date back to the 1970s when as a graduate student at the LSE I formed the intention to write a revisionist history of the Soviet role in the origins of the cold war. To an extent the book represents the fulfillment of that youthful ambition: one of its central narrative strands is the story of how during the war Stalin came to embrace the perspective of a peacetime grand alliance with Britain and the United States – a long-term alliance that would establish a long-term détente that would provide a framework for the tripartite pursuit of common interests – above all the long-term subjugation of Germany and Japan and the avoidance of a new world war. Stalin clung to this perspective for quite some time after the war, notwithstanding clashes and conflicts with the western powers in the early postwar years. Only in mid-1947 – after the launch of the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan - did Stalin finally embrace a cold war perspective and completely seal off the Soviet-communist bloc in Eastern Europe from the rest of the continent. Even then, Stalin was so concerned about the negative consequences of the cold war that in the late 1940s and early 1950s he resumed his efforts to seek a détente with the west.

However, the particular analytical theme of my assessment of the Soviet role in the origins of the cold war concerns the critical role played by communist ideology and, in that respect, there is a significant convergence between my views and those of traditionalist and post-traditionalist historians of the cold war. I confess to being bemused, therefore, by Zubok's observation that “the absence of Stalin's ideological mind-frame in the book is striking” since I thought I had written a book about Stalin as an ideological actor in which ideology figures as the single most important explanatory variable. True, I see Stalin's communist ideology as flexible, pragmatic and changing. But again and again in the book – as Maddux observes - I return to ideology to explain his actions. Above all, my argument is that Stalin's ideological ambitions and perceptions undermined the project of a peacetime grand alliance because he could not acknowledge that the communist challenge in postwar Europe was seen as fundamentally threatening by western politicians. Actually, my overarching interpretation of Stalin's postwar policy is not that different from the “revolutionary-imperial” paradigm proposed by Pleshakov and Zubok in their well-known book. I prefer, however, the notion of a “revolutionary-patriotic” paradigm because I locate Stalin's postwar expansionism in a narrative of the patriotic reinvention of Soviet communism and the impact this had on Moscow's desire for new territories and new

¹ [Ed Note] Geoffrey Roberts, “Sexing up the Cold War: New Evidence on the Molotov-Truman Talks of April 1945,” *Cold War History* 4.3 (April 2004): 105-125. doi: 10.1080/1468274042000231178. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1468274042000231178>.

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strategic positions – demands that were seen as fair and reasonable rewards for the Soviet Union's decisive role in winning the anti-fascist war.

My fourth point concerns the theme of missed opportunities. It is my view that the grand alliance could have been maintained after the war and the cold war averted. Standing in the way of this possibility being realised were Stalin's ideological ambitions and patriotic sensibilities on the one hand and western anti-communism on the other. Of critical importance, too, was the historical background of hostilities in Soviet-Western relations. Maddux is quite right to highlight this omission in the book – surprising given that the first phase of my research on the history of Soviet foreign policy was devoted to the 1930s. But I don't see these as impassable obstacles. There were opportunities in 1945-1946, even in 1947, for both sides to halt the descent into cold war. In this respect I was impressed by Wilson Miscamble's recent argument in his *From Roosevelt to Truman: Potsdam, Hiroshima and the Cold War* that for quite a while after the war Truman and Byrnes continued the Rooseveltian strategy towards the USSR of "containment through integration" (as Gaddis puts it). The difference I have with him is that I think it a pity that the strategy wasn't pursued more consistently and persistently since my researches on Soviet policy have convinced me that – notwithstanding all the difficulties – it could have eventually borne fruit. The same critical point applies to Stalin and the Soviet side of the equation. Maddux and Zubok both mention the Byrnes Plan for a treaty on the long-term disarmament and demilitarisation of Germany. Zubok says that "the new evidence (not used by Roberts)...reveals that Stalin, as well as his entourage, did not want to withdraw Soviet troops from East Germany under any circumstances." I am not sure what new evidence he is referring to, but in the book I do summarise the internal Soviet discussion on the Byrnes Plan, as recorded in documents in volume 2 of the Kynin and Laufer's *SSSR i Germanskii Vopros* and I have also published an article which deals with this issue in more detail ("Litvinov's Lost Peace, 1941-1946", *Journal of Cold War Studies*, vol.4, no2, Spring 2002).² I don't agree with Zubok's interpretation of this discussion but the more important point here is that I do see the Byrnes Plan as a significant missed opportunity by the Soviet side – one of many during the early postwar years. In other words, I see Stalin as missing major opportunities to consolidate the grand alliance as well as the west – contrary to perceptions that I blame Britain and the United States for the cold war. But I should have spelled this out more clearly in the book.

But was a long-term Soviet-Western détente possible with a Soviet Union ruled by Stalin? As Caroline Kennedy-Pipe reminds us this is the question posed by Gaddis, who argues that in the end it was not rival ideologies or power conflicts that made the cold war inevitable but Stalinism. She questions, too, the relationship between the nature of Stalin's domestic polity and the possibilities represented by his foreign policy in its relations with the west. This issue is also broached by Vladimir Pechatnov in his recent book, *Stalin, Rusvel't, Truman: SSSR i SShA v 1940-kh gg*, where he argues that Stalin's problem was continuing the grand alliance while at the same time safeguarding the Soviet regime from destabilizing

² [Ed Note] Geoffrey Roberts, "Litvinov's Lost Peace, 1941-1946", *Journal of Cold War Studies* 4.2 (Spring 2002): 23-54. doi: 10.1162/152039702753649638. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1162/152039702753649638>.

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western influences. In the event the problem was resolved by the rapid break up of the grand alliance, which allowed Stalin to retreat into isolation – a position from which he never really emerged, notwithstanding a return to the détente perspective in the late 1940s and early 1950s.

The question of whether or not the Stalin regime was politically capable of sustaining a peacetime grand alliance is the greatest challenge posed to my anti-cold war, pro-détente perspective (and it is a theme that will recur in my forthcoming work on Soviet-Western relations in the 1950s). I tackle this problem in a chapter on Stalin's postwar domestic policy, a section of the book which does, as Zubok puts it, push the envelope (but not too far, I hope). My suggestion is that the postwar Stalin regime was transitional and headed for the more benign authoritarian Soviet system of the post-Stalin era. My speculation is that in the absence of the cold war those transitional aspects of post-1945 Stalinism would have become even more pronounced. The historical destiny of the Stalin regime under conditions of postwar détente is anyone's guess but I wouldn't assume that collapse under the impact of western influences was inevitable. Such imagery is heavily influenced post hoc by the fate of Gorbachev's USSR in the 1980s. But conditions in the 1940s (and the 1950s) were very different and we should remember the prolonged Soviet-Western détente of the 1960s and 1970s. While such speculation takes us away from the course of actual historical events it does usefully remind us of the imperative to seek new ways of looking at the past, even if they lead to conclusions that offend conventional opinion.

There are a number of specific points made by the roundtable contributors that I intend to tackle during the course of further discussion but I would like to conclude this commentary by once again thanking them for their reviews of *Stalin's Wars*.

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