

Martin McCauley. *The Rise and Fall of the Soviet Union.* Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 2007. xxix + 522 pp. \$38.00, paper, ISBN 978-0-582-78465-9.

Vladislav Zubok. *A Failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007. 488 S. \$39.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8078-3098-7.



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Almost fifteen years after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, there is still no real consensus concerning the reasons for its demise. This is due partly to the continued lack of access to important archival materials, and partly to the complexity of international and internal developments and pressures that contributed to the Soviet implosion. Vladislav Zubok's insightful study and Martin McCauley's comprehensive textbook obviously serve different purposes (and cover periods of different lengths), but both—McCauley's work more or less implicitly—have to address this fundamental question. The approaches and findings of these well-written works reflect the enormous range of possible explanations for the Soviet Union's unexpected end. Zubok, one of the most prominent in-

terpreters of Soviet international behavior during the Cold War era, combines his reading of Soviet foreign policy with a challenging discussion of profound shifts in the perceptions, thinking, and reformist enthusiasm of Moscow's ruling circles and élite, while McCauley seems to prefer a predominantly economic, long-term diagnosis. Both accounts are based not only on a vast collection of primary and secondary sources—with Zubok the more successful hunter—but also, almost unavoidably in current Soviet studies, on a huge stock of personal experiences. Again, it is Zubok who translates more successfully individual encounters and former impressions into historical questioning. On the other hand, McCauley's personal recollections underline contemporary possibilities

for detecting cracks behind Soviet façades as well as the dangers of focusing on earlier certainties. Analogous to this methodological problem, his use of jokes illuminates not only "one's understanding and add[s] to the pleasure of studying other cultures" (p. xxii), but shows a certain neglect for specific cultural underpinnings. It is subject to debate whether "many of the best Russian jokes are either Jewish or Armenian," (p. xxii) or whether several Russian jokes are simply anti-Semitic and anti-Caucasian, respectively. McCauley's description of Chechens as "specialists in black market dealings and violence" and his nonchalant--and pointless--revelation of the Jewish origins of some Russian politicians are noteworthy in this context, too (pp. 388, 465-466).

As mentioned earlier, Zubok concentrates on the foreign policy aspects of the Soviet empire-- its diplomatic history and those who occupied the inner circles of policy formulation and implementation. As a result, the impact of, for instance, internal nationalisms on external positions--noticeable as early as the Iran crisis--remains vague;[1] equally, the weight of economic developments--the USSR's special challenge"or strategic military options await more detailed explanations.[2] Above all, these omissions reflect the uneven stage of research.

Zubok explains in detail the impact of Soviet economic and psychological exhaustion on the emergence of the Cold War. Iran and Turkey proved to be the first serious tests of Western patience, although the main frontline ran through Germany--rightfully, Zubok links the Korean War to the global antagonistic developments in Asia and Europe. Some unnecessary inaccuracies notwithstanding (pp. 64, 70), these first chapters represent a successful overview of Josef Stalin's contribution to the Cold War. For his classical approach to diplomatic history, Zubok relies once more on his classical conceptual framework, that is, the "revolutionary-imperial paradigm": The defensive quest for security in a competitive world

led to the accumulation of power. Nevertheless, the meaning of "security," "competition," and the stage of being satisfied were defined not only by state interest, but by ideological perceptions and convictions as well. Indeed, this fundamental of Soviet international behavior helps to explain the contradictory zigzag of Stalin's international undertakings, and it contributes to the analysis of Nikita Khrushchev's worldwide adventurism that culminated in the Cuban Missile Crisis. Those days revealed the pernicious mixture of ideological over-optimism and half-cooked strategic considerations; incidentally, the deep gap between today's relatively positive assessments of Khrushchev's courageous rejection of Stalin and newer research (including Zubok's) concerning Khrushchev's foreign policy is remarkable. That research again points to the enormous importance of Soviet leaders' personalities in the USSR's concrete implementation of "proletarian internationalism." Besides, a state system like the Soviet Union's, organized around personal networks and hierarchies, added influential ingredients to international policy-making. Zubok skilfully demonstrates the intimate, direct relationship between power struggles and foreign policy maneuvers in the post-Stalinist years: the new openness toward Yugoslavia and Austria put an end to Vyacheslav Molotov's domestic career as well. This Soviet intertwining of domestic and international policy-making continued until the end of the empire. At the same time, the new (semi-)collective leadership and its politics of limited de-Stalinization gave way to the emergence of a new generation, the "men and women of the sixties." The social, and, more important, the mental and cultural transformations of the post-Stalinist years appear as Zubok's crucial point on the way to the Union's fall. According to Zubok, those years saw, among others, the birth of new, "enlightened" apparatchiks whose fondness for reforms and liberalization efforts made Gorbachev's new designs conceivable and possible.

In this *longue durée*, the Brezhnev reign appears as a dragging demonstration of systemic peculiarities as well as shortcomings of the Soviet system, of the inertia of ideological conceptions and Cold Warriors' convictions, and of the dependence of international solutions on the big "other," with its problems, failures, and erroneous conclusions. Against this background, it took "Brezhnev's personal and increasingly emotional involvement and his talents as a domestic consensus builder" (p. 223) to reach a *detente* that lasted from 1968 until 1972; the aforementioned factors led to its limited duration. Zubok sees the bipolar ideology of the Soviet Union, with its belief in "peace through strength," combined with the (often realized) "potential for an anti-*detente* backlash in the United States" (p. 231) and specific overvaluations of Soviet strategic skills in Africa (Angola), Europe (Poland), and Asia (Afghanistan), as main obstacles to a lasting reconciliation.

Under Mikhail Gorbachev, the majority of those ingredients of a self-perpetuating Cold War became obsolete. He based his foreign policy on his conviction in the world's interdependence, developed a profound affinity for the West, and was able to elicit, after the U.S. government's long hesitation, the cooperation of Western politicians. Explanations for the end of the Cold War that focus exclusively on either the decline of Soviet power in combination with Reagan's successful acceleration of the arms race, or on domestic structural (economic and financial) reasons, again neglect the important role of Soviet leaders' personalities, worldviews, and attitudes in a system of personal leadership.

In contrast to Zubok's multifaceted interpretation of the Soviet handling of the Cold War, McCauley aims to present a comprehensive description of the Soviet years, including, among others, the year 1917, the Cheka (linked with the Comintern under the title "Soviet Power, Terror and Civil War"), the nationality question, women, diplomats and spies, the Gulag, World War II, the

Cold War, a somehow static comparison of Hitler, Stalin, and Mao, considerations of "Bolshevik speak," Chernobyl, and a final chapter "Russia Reborn." In striking contrast to Zubok, discussion of, for instance, "RYAN" or social post-Stalinist transformations are missing. McCauley's work combines vivid text passages, several informative background materials, and telling illustrations. Unfortunately, his maps show a clear bias in favor of the Stalin era; the biographies are selective (with Georgy Malenkov and Nikolai Bucharin missing); the reader simply has to know the original sources and arguments; and McCauley's further readings and (helpful) sample questions do not always reflect the chapter's narrative. In general, McCauley claims to tell a "tale of the Russian and other Soviet peoples overthrowing their masters and their world view" (p. xxi)—instead, and this is the main weakness, his central theme is the alleged total incompetence of communist systems in all spheres of life and politics (p. xxi). Thus his textbook turns into a timeline of events, colored by a Cold War victor's perspective and suggestions of ideological superiority (pp. 405, 427, 438-439). Stimulating reflections alternate with too-easy conclusions (pp. 229, 390-391), and outdated or incorrect statements (pp. 335-336, 355-356, 402-403) overshadow insightful summaries. The discussion on p. 445 of the importance of moral, intellectual, cultural as well as economic and technological factors for the collapse of the USSR raises relevant questions; unfortunately, it is not really reflected in the previous 444 pages. The above-mentioned economic argument, developed between the lines, suffers from this mixture of educated guesses, generalizations of personal experiences, and somewhat unexpected certainties. Nevertheless, although unreliable as a guide through Soviet history, the textbook points to relevant topics which may enrich analyses of the Soviet experiment and its failure.

Notes

[1]. Jamil Hasanli, *At the Dawn of the Cold War: The Soviet-American Crisis over Iranian Azerbaijan, 1941-1946* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006).

[2]. Aleksandr Fursenko and Timothy Naftali. *Khrushchev's Cold War: The Inside Story of an American Adversary* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2006); for the military input, see for example I. B. Bystrova, *Sovetskii voenno-promyshlennyi kompleks: problemy stanovleniia i razvitiia (1930-1980-e gody)* (Moscow: Institut Rossiiskoi Istarii, 2006).

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