Schmitz is a prodigiously prolific author whose work ranges across an uncommonly broad spectrum of U.S. history. He is also an abundantly and deservedly honored long-serving professor at Whitman College. He brings to this work an impressive lifetime-store of erudition as well as rare, classroom-honed pedagogical gifts. *The Sailor* is leaner, less nuanced, and more thesis-driven than Dallek's classic work, decidedly less critical of FDR than Frederick Mark's *Wind over Sand*, and broader in chronological scope than Warren Kimball's *The Juggler*, to name the principal works with which it will inevitably be compared. Schmitz's account will serve as a useful refresher for seasoned scholars and an especially invaluable introduction for students seeking to understand the United States' role in the great mid-century cauldron of crises that gave us the modern international system.

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GEOFFREY ROBERTS

Stalin, Revolution, and the Spectre of War

Jonathan Haslam. *The Spectre of War: International Communism and the Origins of World War II*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2021, 481pp. $39.95 (hardcover).

In this book, Jonathan Haslam makes a welcome return to his roots as a historian of Soviet foreign policy and international communism between the two world wars. In the 1970s and 1980s, Haslam, together with his mentor, E.H. Carr, pioneered the documentary study of Comintern and interwar Soviet foreign policy. These were years in which the Soviets published many thousands of documents from their diplomatic archives. Haslam and Carr showed, with judicious use, that this new source enabled credible, evidence-driven accounts of Soviet foreign relations far superior to the Cold War polemics that had hitherto dominated the field.[1]

The hallmark of Haslam's early writings was that he adhered closely to the documentary evidence, a methodology that served him well then and does so again in the present book.[2] Since Haslam published his first books forty years ago much has changed, notably the collapse of Soviet communism and the

1. See Carr's *Twilight of Comintern, 1930–1935* (London, 1982) and *The Comintern and the Spanish Civil War* (London, 1984); Haslam's *Soviet Foreign Policy, 1930–1933* (London, 1983); *The Soviet Union and the Struggle for Collective Security in Europe, 1933–1939* (London, 1984); *The Soviet Union and the Threat from the East, 1933–1941* (London, 1992). Haslam later wrote a fine biography of Carr: *The Vices of Integrity* (London, 1999).

2. Less convincing in that regard was Haslam's *Russia's Cold War* (New Haven, CT, 2011).

consequent opening of Russian archives. Yet the broad outline of the story he tells today remains much the same as he described it then.

The Bolsheviks entered the world political arena intent on revolutionizing international relations by abolishing the state system to replace it with a world socialist federation. When the hoped-for revolutions in other countries failed to materialize, they adapted to coexistence with a hostile capitalist world. Their revolutionary aspirations remained alive and active—often complicating their relations with western states—but their overriding priority was to safeguard the security and prosperity of the world's first socialist state.

In the 1930s, the Soviets reacted to the existential threat of Nazi Germany by pursuing collective security and the creation of anti-fascist popular fronts of progressives and democrats. But those efforts failed in the context of Western appeasement of Hitler. Moscow's last diplomatic overture was the 1939 triple alliance negotiations with Britain and France. Only when those talks failed did Stalin finally resort to concluding a pact with Hitler. In re-telling this familiar story, Haslam makes extensive use of the myriad sources on Comintern and Soviet diplomacy now available from Russian archives. While specialists will not find a lot that is new—most of his citations refer to already-published archival collections—Haslam's use of the post-Soviet material is usually sure-footed, but he does stumble occasionally.

For example, he juxtaposes Stalin's well-known statement to Comintern leader, Georgy Dimitrov, in September 1939—that the Soviet Union should take advantage of the European war that had just broken out—alongside a quote from an "unreported to the public" speech by Stalin in April 1927, that in 1917 the Bolsheviks had been able to seize power in Russia because the imperialists were split and at war with each other (329). The implication being that maybe Stalin was thinking that war could once again become the hand-maiden of revolution. However, Haslam's presentation is somewhat misleading. Stalin's 1927 speech was, to Moscow party activists, so hardly secret. It was about current upheavals in China and Stalin argued against those in the party who wanted the Chinese communists to pursue a more revolutionary course. Stalin's point was that in 1927 the international situation was different from that in 1917. The imperialists were not at war and nor were they split. Hence, the Chinese comrades needed to be cautious and take things slowly.[3] In his conversations with Dimitrov in 1939, Stalin was just as cautious: it would be wrong to attempt to turn the imperialist war into a revolutionary war because that might end up endangering the existence of the Soviet Union.

Bizarrely, Haslam claims that in general Stalin's "grasp of the international situation was woefully weak . . . based as it was upon the assumption of an active capitalist conspiracy against the Soviet Union" (94). This is odd because this

3. Haslam cites a Russian journal's publication of the speech in 2001 but the archive version may be found here: Doc. 7, D1110, F. 558, Russian State Archive of Sociopolitical History (RGASPI).

book provides ample evidence of Stalin as an avid and acute observer of international affairs. Stalin was indeed fixed by his ideology, but he was not blinded by it. He made many diplomatic missteps—not least during the run-up to Hitler's 1941 invasion of the USSR—but then flawless decision-making is always easier in retrospect. Stalin not alone practiced diplomacy, he studied its history and read the works and memoirs of celebrated diplomats, including those of the Iron Chancellor, Otto von Bismarck, a master of realpolitik he seems to have found far more appealing than Machiavelli.[4]

Haslam's new angle in this book is the crucial role anti-communism played in shaping events leading to a major European war breaking out in 1939 and then to Hitler's invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941. Post-1918, Western elites had feared a new world war, but they feared Bolshevik revolution even more. Communism was the spectre haunting interwar Europe not fascism. "Better Hitler than Stalin" was a widespread sentiment among conservatives. As Haslam notes, the anti-communists' "debilitating preoccupation with Bolshevism" did not just hamper cooperation with the Soviet Union, it prevented them from perceiving the greater threat of Hitler and possibility of an unholy alliance between him and Stalin (258).

Haslam believes anti-communism to be a neglected topic in the historiography of the origins of World War II, but he is by no means the first historian to harp on this theme. Anti-communism's role has for decades been a staple in the literature on British and French appeasement. Nor were Soviet historians slouches when it came to exposing the machinations of the anti-communists among the Western ruling classes. In Hitler studies, the relationship between his anti-Semitism and his anti-Bolshevism is a perennial topic of debate. Above all, there is the work of Michael Carley, who has published numerous books and articles making arguments similar to Haslam's. No one has delved deeper into Russian archives on prewar Soviet diplomacy than Carley, yet his work is completely ignored by Haslam.[5]

Haslam's sustained focus on anti-communism does highlight a factor underplayed by traditional diplomatic historians. And, like Carley, he has the linguistic skills and breadth of research necessary to produce a compelling, integrated account of interwar Soviet-Western relations. Among the outstanding chapters and sections in *The Spectre of War* are those on the popular front in France, the Spanish Civil War, the Munich crisis, the failed triple alliance talks, the negotiations that led to the Nazi-Soviet pact, and the Soviet-Finnish war of 1939–1940.

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4. On Stalin's studies of diplomacy: Geoffrey Roberts, *Stalin's Library: A Dictator and His Books* (New Haven, CT, 2022), 121–126.

5. M.J. Carley, *Revolution and Intervention: The French Government and the Russian Civil War, 1917–1919*, (Montreal, 1983); *The Alliance That Never Was and the Coming of World War II* (Chicago, IL, 2009); and *Silent Conflict: A Hidden History of Early Soviet-Western Relations* (Lanham, MD, 2014). Carley has recently completed work on a three-volume study of Soviet-Western relations in the 1930s.

While Haslam's focus is Europe, his narrative includes significant treatments of the negative effects on Anglo-Soviet relations of communist agitation within the British Empire, the rise, fall, and resurrection of Chinese communism, and the Sino-Japanese war. In relation to the Far East, he points out that while Japan saw itself as an anti-communist state actively combatting Bolshevism, Western powers (including the United States) viewed the Soviets as a useful counter to Japanese ambitions. They welcomed Soviet military aid to China and would no doubt have been happy to cheer them on had they intervened in the war directly. But Stalin was too cautious to conclude anything more binding or specific than a non-aggression treaty with Chang Kai Shek. Stalin feared not Japan but the re-emergence of the international anti-communist coalition that had attempted to strangle Bolshevism at birth during the Russian civil war.

No book on the origins of World War II is complete without some reflection on its lessons. For Haslam, the main lesson is that ideologically-driven states, like leopards, do not change their spots. Interwar liberals were wrong to assume the Soviet Union would evolve into a normal state with a rational and interest-driven foreign policy, and conservatives made the same mistake in relation to Hitler's Germany. While liberals neglected the ideological factor, the conservatives' obsession with Bolshevism meant they missed the danger of a Stalin-Hitler compact.

"Could Bolshevism and fascism ever re-emerge?" asks Haslam in his conclusion. Probably not, but the interwar years also show "that in political life the extreme can all too easily become mainstream" (384). The main precipitating event for interwar extremism was the economic Great Depression of the late 1920s and early 1930s. Haslam worries the global economy could again crash, as a result of a Great Inflation arising from the widespread resort to loose monetary policy, an anxiety in which he is not alone.

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