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Reviews

Soviet Foreign Policy in the West, 1936–1941: A Review Article

MICHAEL JABARA CARLEY

Silvio Pons, *Stalin and the Inevitable War, 1936–1941*. London and Portland, OR: Frank Cass, 2002, xvi + 240 pp., £39.50h/b.
Albert L. Weeks, *Stalin's Other War: Soviet Grand Strategy, 1939–1941*. Oxford and Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002, xi + 201 pp., £18.95 p/b..

TWO OR THREE DAYS AFTER the beginning of the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union Stalin offered a simple explanation for how he and his colleagues had put their country in such peril. Molotov recounted the story long afterward to Felix Chuev, who recorded Molotov's memoirs: 'I remember it well; [Stalin] simply said, "We blew it". Yes, we blew it. Such a troubled state Stalin was in then. I tried to cheer him up …'.[1] Few people would now dispute that Stalin and his small circle of advisers had 'blown it'. The question is how did the Soviet Union botch its strategic position and nearly its existence. Pons and Weeks are the latest in a long line of historians to address this issue in books which focus on Soviet foreign policy in the last years before the outbreak of World War II.

Pons, an Italian specialist in international affairs, was one of the first Western scholars to gain access to the Russian foreign policy archives in Moscow (AVPRF); his diminutive signature can be found frequently on the inside left cover where researchers are asked to sign their names acknowledging use of the files. The date after the signature is often 1991, the year the archives were partially opened. I say partially because a researcher gets what the AVPRF archivist decides to bring out. There are no inventories to consult. It is all whimsy and luck: the archivist's whimsy and the historian's luck—or bad luck. It often happens that one researcher sees a file that a colleague has not, and *vice versa*. Being first in the queue helped Pons, who has also made good use of the party archives (RGASPI), which are easier to access. In any event, Pons has seen more files in Moscow than many other specialists and what he has to say is worth reading. His book is translated from Italian with occasional updates.

While Pons is a researcher of the first order, Weeks is of a lower calibre. He taught at New York University and, according to the back cover notes, has also been a journalist and 'policy analyst' for the US State Department. The publisher says Weeks 'has studied Soviet Russia for more than fifty years'. In all these studies, however, Weeks, unlike Pons, did not undertake research in the AVPRF or RGASPI, nor has he consulted the various published volumes drawn from these collections. The sources for his book are for the most part secondary with an occasional reference to *1941 god*, a two volume collection of Soviet papers on the build-up to the Nazi invasion of 22 June 1941.[2] Weeks also makes casual use of *Nazi–Soviet Relations, 1939–1941*, a well-known collection of documents from the German archives published as Cold

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War propaganda against the Soviet Union by the US State Department in 1948. Weeks did not use the Soviet *Falsifiers of History*, produced in reply.[3]

In spite of the differences in the evidentiary bases of the two books, Pons and Weeks focus on many of the same issues. Pons follows Soviet policy from 1936 to 1941, Weeks from 1939 to 1941, though in fact he goes back to the beginnings of the Soviet state. The major issues are the usual ones. Was Soviet policy ideologically motivated by the desire to spread world socialist revolution or was it driven by conventional reasons of state? Did Stalin prefer relations with Nazi Germany because of good relations in the 1920s and an affinity for German national socialism? Or was the Soviet Union driven to conclude the Nazi–Soviet non-aggression pact in August 1939 by France and Britain, who were indifferent or hostile to Soviet proposals for collective security and the containment of Nazi Germany (1933–39)? Was the Nazi–Soviet pact Stalin's reply to Anglo–French capitulation at Munich in September 1938 and dilatory negotiations with the Soviet government in 1939 for an anti-Nazi tripartite alliance? Finally, was Stalin contemplating a 'pre-emptive' attack against Nazi Germany in 1941–42?

Pons takes the view that Soviet foreign policy was indeed motivated by ideology, in particular, by the doctrine of the inevitability of war. This meant that Soviet policy makers and Stalin in particular did not differentiate between the capitalist states. They all equally threatened the Soviet Union, and there was little to distinguish them. Stalin and his colleagues anticipated World War II, not so much because of 'political awareness and clear sightedness' as because of the influence of 'Lenin's doctrine on imperialism and ... [their] original experience forged in the cycle of wars of 1914–21'. The foreign intervention in the Russian civil war (1917–21) 'became the archetype of an undifferentiated, hostile outside world. This was to be the principle in the Soviet concept of foreign affairs, the basis for the isolation and antagonism of the Soviet world'. The five-year plans, according to Pons, 'reinforced a strategic choice to separate the Soviet Union from the chaotic, conflict ridden capitalist world' (pp. ix–x).

In attempting to substantiate his assertions Pons quotes the public statements of Soviet and Comintern officials like Karl Radek, N. I. Bukharin, D. Z. Manuil'sky, E. S. Varga and Georgi Dimitrov, among others. So far, so good, one might conclude, but none of these individuals was charged with *formulating* Soviet foreign policy. Radek and Bukharin soon disappeared in the purges. Manuil'sky was lucky not to have joined them, as Stalin considered him to be 'strictly a lightweight'.[4] Varga was an exiled Hungarian economist working in the Comintern; he did not make Soviet foreign policy. Dimitrov, a Bulgarian, was one of Stalin's 'soldiers'; he did as ordered. Their public statements were not the secret communications that went from the Narkomindel (the commissariat for foreign affairs) either up to Stalin and the Politburo or out to Soviet embassies and other establishments abroad. There was a difference between 'talking Bolshevik' about class struggle and the proletariat in public and discussing *Realpolitik*, balance of power and trade agreements in secret. So it is all the more surprising that Pons presses his position with evidence from Dimitrov *et al.* when he has seen so many files from the Narkomindel where 'talking Bolshevik' was rarely heard.

Pons might have been better to focus on the ideas of G. V. Chicherin and M. M. Litvinov. Chicherin was commissar for foreign affairs during the 1920s and Litvinov during the 1930s. Neither Chicherin nor Litvinov was tolerant of the Comintern's dabbling in revolution abroad. Litvinov, who was deputy commissar under Chicherin during the 1920s, was in reality a kind of co-commissar, and he acted effectively as commissar after 1928. The foreign policy archives in Moscow hold a large collection of his papers. Litvinov did not 'speak Bolshevik' in his private communications, in contrast to what he might say in a speech at a party meeting. He once quipped to a foreign diplomat that of course he could use that 'language' if the diplomat so desired. He did not joke, however, in 1923 when he wrote a letter dripping with sarcasm to G. E. Zinoviev, then head of the Comintern, asking him to call off his agents in Germany who threatened to damage relations with Weimar Germany, the only major European state with

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which the Soviet Union had tolerable relations.[5] Nor did Litvinov joke in 1925 when he and Chicherin signed a rare joint letter to the Politburo asking for the recall of the Soviet chargé d'affaires in Paris, the left oppositionist, A. G. Shlyapnikov, who was talking too much Bolshevik and disturbing recently renewed diplomatic relations with France.[6] Litvinov even spoke indiscreetly with foreign diplomats about his disdain for the Comintern, a group of chatterboxes and scribblers who ought to be invited to leave the Soviet Union.[7] For Chicherin and Litvinov the Comintern was an obstacle to better relations with the West, and by the end of the 1920s the Soviet government appears to have brought it more or less under control.

Pons also refers frequently to 'isolation' as a chosen Soviet foreign policy, but it is hard to see as one chosen rather than imposed by France, Britain and the United States. The Allied maritime blockade against Germany was extended to Soviet Russia in December 1917. Allied intervention aimed to crush Soviet Russia, and the French *cordon sanitaire* to contain it when the intervention failed. The French were complicit in the Polish offensive against Soviet Russia in April 1920, and the French and British meddled in the Kronstadt uprising in March 1921. But it did not stop there. When in 1921 the Soviet government sought peaceful coexistence with the West, linked at home to the New Economic Policy, it was rebuffed. The Soviet government asked for loans and trade credits in Europe and the United States, but most bankers and governments declined to advance the money or the credits, except in Weimar Germany. Even in the 1930s the Soviet government could not get loans, though it did obtain trade credits. In the mid-1930s political relations improved briefly because of the rise of Nazi Germany, but in 1936 anti-communism in the West became acute after the electoral victory of the Popular Front in France and the outbreak of the Spanish civil war. The Stalinist purges did not help to improve relations with France, Britain and the United States, but the purges came *after*, not before the West's brief interest in better relations petered out. The French interest began to decline in late 1934, the British in early 1936 and the American in mid-1934.

If the Soviet government was isolated during the inter-war years, it was not by choice except perhaps in making a virtue out of necessity. Whether it was peaceful coexistence in the 1920s or collective security in the 1930s, the Soviet government wanted correct political and economic relations in the West and later a defensive alliance against Nazi Germany. The high point—more apparent than real—of Soviet foreign policy during the 1930s was the conclusion of mutual assistance pacts with France and Czechoslovakia in 1935.

Weeks would challenge the notion of *Realpolitik* or balance of power in Soviet foreign policy. He quotes frequently from public statements by Lenin and Stalin, though he scarcely ever provides their context, source or date. Weeks is keen to show that Soviet diplomacy was a dishonest cover for the real purposes of the Soviet Union, the spread of world socialist revolution. Thus collective security was a bogus policy; its architect, Litvinov, being 'always willing to oblige' Stalin (p. 70). Weeks is not of course the first to promote these ideas. The late Adam Ulam said Litvinov was Stalin's 'tool'. R. C. Raack pursues similar lines of argument.[8] The available evidence fails to support their position. Litvinov and Chicherin often turned to Stalin in the 1920s asking for support in pursuing pragmatic, not revolutionary policies in Western Europe. Stalin was a *Litvinovets* before Litvinov became a Stalinist, in so far as he could be one.[9]

Dismissing such ideas, Weeks quotes heavily from a speech which Stalin allegedly gave at a meeting of the Politburo on 19 August 1939 just prior to the conclusion of the Nazi–Soviet non-aggression pact. Stalin talked about playing off the French and British against the Germans, undermining the Western democracies and coming in at the end of a long war to spread world revolution (Appendix, pp. 171–173). Weeks should have thought this document too good to be true. He attributes its to Georgi Dimitrov's diary, but it is nowhere to be found there. In fact, it turned up in French military intelligence documents captured by the Red Army

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at the end of World War II. It is not clear whether the 'original' document, obtained by the French 2^{e} Bureau, was written in French or in Russian.[10] On 28 November 1939 the Paris daily *Le Temps* first published a Havas despatch from Geneva quoting Stalin's comments. The story caused a 'sensation', according to Ya. Z. Surits, the Soviet *polpred* in Paris. Both *Le Temps* and Havas were semi-official government sources. Surits linked the release of the 'document' to domestic anti-communist politics.[11] Unlike Weeks, Pons is more cautious in assessing the authenticity of Stalin's 'speech' (pp. 190–191). The forgery of Soviet government documents was good business prior to World War II. Weeks appears to be the last in a long line of buyers of such material, though surprisingly Pons also lends it some credibility. In a recent article the Russian historian Sergei Z. Sluch notes that the 'speech' has a long history and many variants, and he argues persuasively that it is a fake. Surely, Sluch writes, historians have enough legitimate materials to study without indulging in 'sensationalism' based on counterfeit documents.[12]

Weeks does make reference to a legitimate source in referring to an entry in Dimitrov's diary relating Stalin's comments to a small group of Comintern and Politburo members on 7 September 1939 where he spoke of manoeuvring between the Anglo–French coalition and the Germans (p. 73). 'We see nothing wrong', Stalin said, 'in their having a good hard fight and weakening each other'. However, Weeks leaves out something else Stalin said: 'We preferred agreements with the so-called democratic countries and therefore conducted negotiations. But the English and French wanted us for farmhands ... and at no cost!'[13] This was a position which Stalin sometimes repeated to foreign interlocutors during World War II.[14] Weeks wants to demonstrate Stalin's interest in world revolution, but in fact Stalin's actions mostly belied his words. Evidence suggests he was not, as Weeks contends, primarily interested in spreading world socialist revolution.[15] Stalin's cynicism about the imperialist powers being pitted against one another had its mirror image in the West. 'If there is any fighting in Europe to be done', British Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin said in 1936, 'I should like to see the Bolshies and the Nazis doing it'.[16] His successor Neville Chamberlain had similar ideas. The 'Russians', he said in 1938, were 'stealthily and cunningly pulling all the strings behind the scenes to get us involved in war with Germany ...'.[17] Stalin might simply have replied that turn-about is fair play.

Soviet–German relations figure prominently in studies of the origins of World War II. Weeks is no exception. He states that the treaty of Brest-Litovsk (1918) and the treaty of Berlin (1926) were harbingers of future, significant bilateral co-operation between the two ' "loser" states' (p. 45). It is hard to understand how the author can see the treaty of Brest-Litovsk as a harbinger of bilateral co-operation since its terms were so draconian that the Soviet government did not respect them anymore than it was forced to do so. But Weeks persists: 'close, active collaboration between the two ... never really ceased—with the exception of a few ups and downs ...' (p. 48). In the 1920s there was German–Soviet military co-operation: tank and aircraft plants and schools were built to train German soldiers and pilots. All this contributed to Hitler's military preparations in the 1930s. Weeks refers to A. M. Nekrich's work on Soviet–German relations to strengthen his case, but Nekrich shows that the Soviet–German military co-operation was modest: 1,200 German pilots trained over seven years (1926–32), a few bombers built and a handful of Red Army soldiers trained in ten tanks supplied by Germany.[18]

Weeks sees a 'Soviet–Fascist totalitarian kinship' (p. 50), which facilitated relations in the 1930s. Here Weeks must be joking. Soviet–German relations deteriorated precipitously after Hitler took power in 1933. The collapse in relations was often the topic of discussions between Soviet and German diplomats in 1933–34. Litvinov more than once asked his German interlocutors about *Mein Kampf*, Hitler's blueprint for European conquest. 'Hitler's book belongs to the past' was a common refrain, as German diplomats protested their government's

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peaceful intentions. Smiling politely, Litvinov replied with mocking disbelief.[19] Never one to mince his words where he had a potentially sympathetic ear, Litvinov said Hitler was 'a dog, liar, and blackguard' whose promises to any country were 'worthless'.[20] To Weeks this may look like dust in the eyes. Litvinov, he says, proposed a 'mutual non-aggression pact' to the Germans in 1935 (pp. 67–68). He offers as evidence a telegram from the German ambassador in Moscow, Count Werner von der Schulenburg, reporting Litvinov's proposal.[21] In fact, Litvinov suggested nothing of the kind: he was referring to a proposed multilateral, not bilateral European agreement, originally called Eastern Locarno. Litvinov left his own brief account of the meeting with Schulenburg: 'I hope', he said, 'that the conclusion of a "regional pact" can lead to "more correct" Soviet–German relations'.[22] Litvinov was playing along here: he did not take Eastern Locarno too seriously. He knew Hitler had no interest in it, but openness to a multilateral agreement was good cover for bilateral negotiations with France for a mutual assistance pact, just then concluded in Paris. Weeks relies solely on Schulenburg's record of the meeting. He wants to demonstrate Litvinov's and the Soviet government's double-dealing, but succeeds only in taking the meeting out of its context. Whenever the Soviet and Western records of such conversations are available, the historian would be wise to read them *both*.

Weeks and Pons point to the activities of the Soviet trade representative in Berlin, D. N. Kandelaki, from 1935 to early 1937 exploring the possibilities of improved Nazi–Soviet relations. This was a Soviet change of policy, according to Pons (p. 65), or at least a sign of 'parallel diplomacy' (p. 67), that is, pursuit of collective security with the West and of overtures to Nazi Germany at the same time. Whereas Weeks sees Litvinov as Stalin's servant, willing to pander to Berlin when so ordered, Pons sees him resisting a major change of policy toward Nazi Germany. Weeks views Kandelaki's activities as another 'straw in the wind' (p. 61) pointing to the real intentions of the Soviet government. Geoffrey Roberts, who has studied these negotiations, proposes that Soviet initiatives were an exploration of limited possibilities, motivated by the disappointing results of collective security and anxiety over Anglo–French pursuit of a general settlement with Nazi Germany.[23] There may be a simpler, less conspiratorial explanation: in 1935 and 1936 the Narkomindel feared a diplomatic rupture with Nazi Germany. 'There is no need for us to strengthen present economic relations with Germany', Litvinov wrote in late 1935: 'in my opinion, it will be sufficient to continue economic relations only in so far as it is necessary to avoid a complete rupture of relations between us [i.e. Germany and the Soviet Union]'. 'I am for now, of course, only expressing my personal point of view, which I am bringing to the notice of our government. Our present Tolstoyian position I consider harmful, for it encourages a further increase of anti-Soviet demonstrations [in Germany]'.[24] Although others in the Soviet government—Molotov, for example—may have had more interest in Kandelaki's activities, Litvinov saw initiatives in Berlin as stop-gap measures to avoid a collapse of Nazi–Soviet relations. These were not 'ups and downs', as Weeks contends, nor was Litvinov Stalin's willing tool.

While Kandelaki probed in Berlin, Soviet diplomats pressed their French counterparts for general staff talks to strengthen the Franco–Soviet and Czech–Soviet mutual assistance pacts. In September 1936 Litvinov urged Stalin to approve a new initiative to start staff talks with France and Czechoslovakia. He saw a 'capitulationist mood' growing in these countries while German military power was increasing at a 'colossal' rate. Something had to be done, Litvinov said, or we could lose the mutual assistance pacts with France and Czechoslovakia. Other countries were intimidated. Had the time not come, Litvinov asked, to consider the building of a 'powerful defensive bloc' based on the consolidation of existing pacts 'directed against Germany and other revisionist countries'?[25] The foundation of this bloc had to be the mutual assistance pacts with France and Czechoslovakia. Fresh Soviet initiatives began in Paris during autumn 1936. There appears to have been hesitation in Moscow at the end of 1936 about pursuing the talks with France—perhaps while Kandelaki's probes were underway—but

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beginning in February 1937 the Soviet ambassador in Paris, V. P. Potemkin, pressed the French strongly for military talks. The French brushed off the Soviet initiative, which died in the spring *before* the purge of the Red Army high command.[26] Of course, the purges offered an ideal *post facto* justification to the French for not pursuing negotiations. Neither Weeks nor Pons focus on Soviet attempts to start staff talks with the French, surely an indication that the Soviet government meant what it said about collective security.

Weeks is equally dismissive of the Soviet Union during the Munich crisis: 'the Soviet Union ... made no concrete effort to defend Czechoslovakia' (p. 64). Pons says Soviet policy was characterised by 'watchfulness' and 'passivity', more than 'involvement'. This was due to the purges and also by 'strategic choice'. Thus France and Britain 'cannot be held entirely responsible for the withdrawal and inaction of the USSR in the face of an increasingly tense European atmosphere' (p. 126). As usual, Pons is more nuanced than Weeks, but both appear off the beam. The British government, led by Neville Chamberlain, did not have the slightest intention of supporting Czechoslovakia against German demands for the annexation of the Sudetenland. Chamberlain considered it a matter of self-determination, or at least a question in which Britain could not intervene. The British government had no treaty obligations toward Czechoslovakia and thus had the luxury of taking this detached position. France did not, for it had concluded a mutual assistance pact with Czechoslovakia in 1925. Édouard Daladier, the French premier, felt the weight of these obligations, recognised that the Sudeten issue was one of European security, not self-determination, but would not act independently of Britain. Georges Bonnet, the French foreign minister, adamantly opposed French intervention and during the summer of 1938 acted on his own initiative to discourage the Czech government from counting on French support. If the Czechs wanted to resist German aggression, it 'was their look out', Bonnet said: '*tant pis pour eux*'.[27] The Soviet Union also saw the Sudeten question as a matter of European security but, without France, the Soviet Union would not move either. It had signed a mutual assistance pact with Czechoslovakia in 1935, in tandem with the French pact, but the Soviet obligation to go to Czech assistance was conditioned on France acting first. Soviet historians have long attributed this key proviso to Czech initiative, but the available evidence suggests that it was the Soviet government which first asked for it.

Knowing that the Franco–Soviet mutual assistance pact had been signed in Paris on 2 May 1935, Edvard Beneš, the Czech foreign minister, called in the Soviet minister in Prague, Sergei S. Aleksandrovsky, on the following day to discuss the text of a Czech–Soviet mirror agreement. Beneš wanted to insert two amendments into the text of the agreement: 1) that Czechoslovakia did not have an obligation to come to Soviet assistance in the event of a Soviet–Polish war; and 2) that the operation of the pact be put within the framework of the 1925 Locarno accords.[28] On the next day, 4 May, the Politburo empowered Aleksandrovsky to agree to a text identical to the French version excluding the reference to Locarno and including the stipulation that Soviet military assistance against aggression would only be given if France also rendered assistance.[29] It appears therefore that the proviso was introduced on Soviet initiative, and understandably so in view of mistrust of France and in particular of Pierre Laval, the French foreign minister. But Beneš was also unwilling to commit to the Soviet Union without France. This was to be a French *ménage à trois*, or it was not to be.

Pons observes that the Soviet government did not intend to offer *unilateral* support to Czechoslovakia in the event the French and British failed to act (p. 131). The Czech historian Igor Lukes asserts that the Soviet government dodged an answer to this question when put by Beneš, then Czech president, in September 1938, and that the Soviet Union was not committed to supporting Czechoslovakia in any event. Soviet support was purely 'cosmetic'.[30] Here Lukes has raised a straw man. Litvinov said that the Soviet Union would honour its obligations to Czechoslovakia if France did also, according to the stipulations of the Czech–Soviet mutual assistance pact. In early September 1938 Litvinov explained the Soviet position to the French

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chargé d'affaires in Moscow: if France supported Czechoslovakia, the Soviet Union would fulfil its obligations with the utmost determination, using every possible avenue of support. Litvinov proposed action in the League of Nations in order to encourage Romanian support. A meeting of the general staffs of Czechoslovakia, France and the Soviet Union should also take place. Finally, Litvinov proposed a conference of the interested powers including France, Britain and the Soviet Union. Such a conference might discourage German aggression and protect Czech independence and territorial integrity.[31] The French and British governments rejected all of Litvinov's proposals.

Pons says the Soviet position was 'hollow' (p. 131), but was it? On 19 September Beneš asked Aleksandrovsky whether the Soviet government would give immediate, concrete help to Czechoslovakia if France did also; and he asked whether the Soviet Union would support Czech action in the League of Nations if it launched an appeal for help. On the following day, 20 September, the Politburo replied in the affirmative.[32] The now deputy commissar for foreign affairs, Potemkin, cabled this decision to Aleksandrovsky on the same day, and Aleksandrovsky telephoned Beneš at 7pm on the evening of 20 September to advise him of the reply from Moscow.[33] The Soviet government thus acted within 24 hours to answer Beneš's questions. So why would Pons and Weeks dismiss Soviet policy as passive or weak? Lukes claims that Beneš's second question was really 'What will the attitude of the Soviet Union be if France refuses to fulfil her obligations?', instead of the question forwarded by Aleksandrovsky concerning Soviet support for Czechoslovakia in the League.[34] 'It does not take much intelligence', says Lukes, 'to see that Aleksandrovsky's version is less plausible than Beneš's'. Lukes also claims that Litvinov 'carefully waited for Beneš to surrender before he said publicly that Moscow had given an affirmative answer to the president's [first] question ...'.[35] The available evidence fails to support Lukes's assertions, though, in his defence, he does not appear to have consulted the Soviet or French diplomatic papers on these issues.

On 21 September Aleksandrovsky met Beneš again. Apparently, it was then that Beneš asked what the Soviet position would be if the French fled their obligations. Aleksandrovsky repeated the Soviet position that it would come to Czechoslovakia's aid, but only if France did the same. In a meeting in Moscow on 22 September Potemkin showed his irritation with the Czech minister in Moscow, Zdeněk Fierlinger, about the new questions. The Czech government, he suggested, would do better to ask the French what they intended to do.[36] On the same day Fierlinger circulated false information to Prague, and to the French ambassador in Moscow, Robert Coulondre, implying that the Soviet Union might aid Czechoslovakia even without French intervention. Potemkin called in Fierlinger on the following day, 23 September, to ask for an explanation. Seriously 'embarrassed', Fierlinger admitted to the conversation with Coulondre—which is confirmed in a Coulondre cable to Paris.[37] Fierlinger wanted to give the impression, he said, that Czechoslovakia could manage without French support, and 'that the USSR, as it were, would not mind concluding with Czechoslovakia a new bilateral agreement'. 'I replied sharply to Fierlinger', Potemkin recorded, 'that he did not have any basis to attribute to us such an intention while we had not formulated a reply to this question ...'.[38] Potemkin warned Fierlinger that he would set matters straight with Coulondre at their next meeting. 'Fierlinger was reduced to complete despair', Potemkin added; 'he asked me not to say anything to Coulondre, so that "matters would not be further confused"'. On leaving, Fierlinger asked Potemkin to excuse him, 'if he [Fierlinger], being guided by the best intentions, was guilty of starting some misunderstandings'.[39] Fierlinger appears to have wanted to create pressure on France to change its policy. This was sharp practice, but it was Czech doing, not Soviet. Can you hear Lukes's straw man falling to the ground?

Pons says that Potemkin rejected unilateral action, but the Soviet government had not considered or promised it, and would have been imprudent to do so, given the French and British positions. The Soviet government did not wish to be left alone facing Nazi Germany,

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any more than did France and Britain. This was not Soviet duplicity; it was Soviet caution. Beneš would not have accepted unilateral Soviet aid in any case. He did not want Czechoslovakia to become another Spain, the battleground of a 'war to the death against Bolshevism'.[40]

Soviet action was not limited to the Politburo's affirmative answers to Beneš's questions of 19 September. On the same day (20 September) as it responded to Beneš, the Politburo apparently also approved partial mobilisation of the Red Army. On 21 September orders were issued for a military build-up on the Polish and Romanian frontiers. This included 76 infantry and cavalry divisions, three tank corps and 22 tank and 17 air brigades.[41] Lukes again questions whether there was any mobilisation at all, though the evidence seems clear that there was.[42] When the Czech government asked the Soviet Union (22 September) for support against a Polish threat to seize by force the Czech district of Teschen, Potemkin summoned the Polish chargé d'affaires in the middle of the night (of 23 September) and threatened to denounce the Soviet–Polish non-aggression pact if Poland attacked Czechoslovakia.[43] What more could the Soviet government have done in view of the Anglo–French position?

The greatest indictment invariably raised against the Soviet Union is the non-aggression pact concluded with Nazi Germany in August 1939. The Soviet Union, Stalin in effect, betrayed the British and French governments which had in good faith negotiated terms of an anti-Nazi alliance in the spring and summer of 1939 and then sent military missions to Moscow in August to conclude an alliance. So the story goes: while Molotov talked with the British and French, he also at the same time negotiated with the Germans. From the Anglo–French point of view this was the height of Soviet treachery. Pons holds that the Soviet government's 'undifferentiated ideological view of the outside world' (p. 156) caused Litvinov and others not to see the evolving changes in Anglo–French policy in 1939. But Litvinov saw well enough to offer the French and British governments on 17 April 1939 an eight-point proposal for a tripartite alliance against Nazi Germany. The Anglo–French response, Pons concedes, putting it mildly, was 'without any zeal' (p. 159).

Litvinov was sacked in early May 1939, apparently because he was too willing to make compromises with the recalcitrant British and French to form an anti-Nazi alliance. Litvinov's sacking, says Weeks, was 'an undeniably friendly gesture' toward Nazi Germany. The year 1939 'was the cardinal year in the process of forming an active Soviet–German alliance' (pp. 69–70). It was then, says Pons, that Stalin launched a 'twin-track' policy (p. 162). Jonathan Haslam also holds to this explanation of Soviet policy.[44] Stalin opted for a German rapprochement, according to Pons, not because the British and French governments left him no choice but because he preferred it on ideological grounds. 'The "collective security" option had been perceptibly undermined after 1936 by clinging to isolationism and to a policy of untrammelled autonomy in international affairs ... The real element of continuity was the permanent conditioning exercised by the isolationist concept of security, which came to be the pivot of Stalin's policy' (p. 179). Pons quotes Stalin in conversation with the Turkish foreign minister on 1 October 1939 reflecting on recent events: '... We have divided Poland with Germany. Britain and France did not declare war on us, but this may happen. We have a mutual assistance pact with the Germans, but if the British and the French declare war on us, we will have to fight them'. There is a mistake here. According to the Russian text, Stalin stated that the Soviet Union did *not* have a mutual assistance pact with Germany. Nor was there an alliance, as Weeks claims, or a preordained path leading to the Nazi–Soviet non-aggression pact. Stalin said as much to the Turkish foreign minister in explaining why negotiations for a Soviet–Turkish mutual assistance pact had failed. 'Who is guilty', Stalin asked rhetorically, for this result? 'Circumstances, the unfolding of events. Polish action played its role. The English and French, especially the English, did not want an agreement with us, calculating that they could manage without us. If there are people guilty, then we also are guilty for not having foreseen all of this'.[45]

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Stalin might have added another error that his government made in the spring of 1939 in negotiations with France and Britain. In April 1939 senior officials in the British Foreign Office had responded with derision to Litvinov's alliance proposal, though the French proved more interested.[46] Litvinov was sacked a few weeks later, but perhaps not (or not only) to signal to the Germans that Stalin was ready to parley—the near-consensus explanation—but to signal to the Anglo–French that it was time to put up or shut up. Molotov, Stalin's bloody right arm, took over the Narkomindel and immediately asked for advice from his ambassadors in London and Paris and from deputy commissar Potemkin.

Potemkin and especially Surits in Paris made the case for trying to work with the French in order to finesse the recalcitrant British into an agreement, meeting more or less the terms advanced by Litvinov in April. On the other hand, I. M. Maisky, *polpred* in London, proposed sticking to Litvinov's proposals and waiting out the British, who would have to come round.[47] This was the policy the Soviet government decided to pursue. Daladier and Bonnet were still in power in Paris; neither was respected or trusted in Moscow. Litvinov had observed in March that everything would be decided in London. Bonnet, he said, was quite possibly even less reliable than Chamberlain.[48] It was a long held view in Moscow that France was dependent on Britain and that it would follow a British line, come what may.

Some historians of France have tried to rehabilitate Daladier and Bonnet as strong proponents in 1939 of a military alliance with the Soviet Union.[49] Bonnet, they say, sent urgent messages to London in favour of negotiations with Moscow. Bonnet even tried to entice Surits in a meeting on 26 May 1939 with the Baltics and an important westward movement of the Polish–Soviet frontier, in exchange for agreement.[50] Here is an interesting proposal, though there is no record of it in Surits' available correspondence, and it is inconceivable that he would fail to report such a remarkable idea to Moscow. Given Bonnet's guile, it is more likely that he sought to persuade Daladier that the price of agreement with the Soviet government was too high.

To what lengths will historians go to make a silk purse out of a sow's ear? For every message Bonnet sent to London encouraging agreement with the Soviet Union, one can find another yielding once again to 'the British line' of slow going. Distrust of Bonnet was not restricted to Moscow; many people in Paris did not trust him either. Surits often heard from French ministers—Pierre Cot, Georges Mandel, Paul Reynaud, for example—who detested Bonnet, a yellow-bellied four flusher, they said in so many words, who talked out of both sides of his mouth and would run at the crack of the first German gun. No one in Moscow would have been persuaded that Daladier and Bonnet were reliable interlocutors. Surits, to his credit, tried but failed to persuade Molotov to negotiate in Paris in order to squeeze the British. In spite of everything, such a strategy might have worked. French public opinion expected war and expected the Soviet Union to ally with France against Nazi Germany. What worried opinion was that it was taking so long to reach agreement. Soviet finesse and the momentum of French and British opinion might have led to the tripartite alliance which Litvinov and even Molotov appeared to want in the spring of 1939. So it might seem in hindsight, but in 1939 it would have taken the resignations of Bonnet and Daladier and their replacement by determined ministers to make an impression in Moscow.

The last issue to which Weeks and Pons turn their attention is the German invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941. In the spring of that year, when Soviet intelligence was being overwhelmed with data on the German build-up on Soviet western frontiers, Gorodetsky notes, Stalin could not imagine that Hitler would be foolish enough to attack the Soviet Union.[51] Gorodetsky's *Grand Delusion* is the definitive work in English on the outbreak of war in the east. Gorodetsky wanted to prove wrong Viktor Rezun (aka Suvorov), who holds that Stalin had planned for a long time to turn the capitalist powers against themselves, tricking them into a mutually destructive war, from which the Soviet Union would pick up the pieces.[52] In the spring of 1941 Stalin planned a pre-emptive strike against Nazi Germany, but Hitler beat him

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to the punch. One can see the affinity between Suvorov and Weeks, and it is therefore not surprising that Weeks wants to challenge Gorodetsky.

Weeks contends that Stalin was leaning toward a pre-emptive strike in the spring of 1941 and that he revealed his mind to graduating military cadets in a speech given on 5 May. Ten days later the Soviet high command produced a draft plan for a pre-emptive strike against the German army. This is proof, says Weeks, of Stalin's intentions. Gorodetsky 'ignores' the May speech and gives short shrift to the mid-May draft plan (p. 104). Both of Weeks's statements are inexact. But let Gorodetsky speak for himself: Stalin's speech 'was to act as a deliberate deterrent, discouraging the Germans from launching the war through a brazen show of confidence, while at the same time invigorating the army in case a war did break out'.[53] As for the 15 May plan, it was an unsigned draft, written and annotated by G. K. Zhukov, chief of staff, and M. K. Timoshenko, commissar for defence, and it was intended as a spoiling operation, which in any event Stalin did not approve.[54] Stalin, as Molotov noted in his reminiscences, sought to delay war as long as possible; even a few months mattered.[55] We were not ready to take on Nazi Germany in 1941, Molotov said in effect, what else could we do but stall? There is an irony here for these were just the arguments used by the French and British to explain their appeasement of Hitler. Contemporary historians often excuse Anglo-French appeasement on the grounds that France and Britain did not have the guns, the warplanes or the treasuries to fight Nazi Germany prior to September 1939.[56] However, not many of the same historians attempt to explain with the same sympathy the same Soviet policy of appeasement, the keystone of which was the Nazi–Soviet non-aggression pact.

Pons does not devote great attention to the lead-up to the war, and he is more careful in his assessment of Stalin's motives. 'We cannot exclude the possibility', writes Pons, 'that Stalin was envisaging a blow against Hitler' (p. 220). 'The brunt of the facts', he continues, 'suggests that before June 1941 Stalin trusted in a "war of attrition" to protect the Soviet Union and to strengthen its power in Europe' (p. 221). This did not exclude Soviet ambitions in eastern and central Europe, but they were not the unlimited revolutionary goals described by Weeks, Lukes, Raack and others of their persuasion. In hindsight it might seem a pity that Stalin did not beat Hitler to the punch, but Zhukov later noted that in 1941 the Red Army was not ready for a pre-emptive attack on Nazi Germany, which would have been disastrous had it been attempted.[57]

Pons demonstrates the kind of work that can be done in Soviet archives even with limited access. Whether one agrees or not with his main contentions, one must respect his archival research. The same cannot be said of Weeks, whose book seems a caricature of the *émigré* or US State Department view of a bellicose and duplicitous Soviet Union. The Soviet archives are an 'Orwellian Memory Hole' (p. 1), he says, and the Soviet government—here Weeks cites a US Senate study in 1959—'had broken its word to virtually every country to which it ever gave a signed promise' (p. 36). This is history based on conviction and assertion, not on evidence. As with others of Weeks's persuasion, the more insistent the claims, the slimmer seems the evidence to back them up.

Did the Soviet Union endanger its strategic position prior to the Nazi invasion in June 1941? Stalin conceded that it had. Could he have conducted a more successful defence of Soviet national interests? In hindsight, certainly, but at the time there seemed no alternatives, certainly not with Chamberlain, Daladier and Bonnet. A sow's ear after all is still a sow's ear. Stalin observed once that 'if you live amongst wolves, you must behave like a wolf' (Pons, p. 220). This was a role too well suited to Stalin, and therein may lie the simplest explanation for why the Soviet Union found itself in such great peril on 22 June 1941. The wolf pack has its own laws.

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[1] Albert Resis (ed.), *Molotov Remembers: Inside Kremlin Politics. Conversations with Felix Chuev* (Chicago, 1993), p. 39.

[2] *1941 god: dokumenty* (2 vols) (Moscow, 1998).

[3] Geoffrey Roberts, 'Stalin, the Pact with Nazi Germany, and the Origins of Postwar Soviet Diplomatic Historiography', *Journal of Cold War Studies*, 4, 4, Fall 2002, pp. 93–103.

[4] Ivo Banac (ed.), *The Diary of Georgi Dimitrov, 1933–1949* (New Haven, 2003), p. 105.

[5] Litvinov to Zinoviev, copies to G. V. Chicherin, L. D. Trotsky, I. V. Stalin, no. 597, secret, 5 June 1923, Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsial' no-politicheskoi istorii (RGASPI), f. 359, o. 1, d. 7, 1. 95, and enclosure 11. 96–98.

[6] Litvinov/Chicherin to Politburo, no. 0049, secret, 20 January 1925, Arkhiv vneshnei politiki Rossiiskoi Federatsii (AVPRF), f. 0136, d. 97, p. 105, ll. 8–10.

[7] Sir Edmond Ovey, British ambassador in Moscow, to Arthur Henderson, foreign secretary, no. 138, 25 February 1930, N1404/75/38, Public Record Office (PRO), Foreign Office (FO) 371 14860.

[8] Adam Ulam, *Expansion and Coexistence: The History of Soviet Foreign Policy, 1917–1967* (New York, 1968), p. 144; and also R. C. Raack, *Stalin's Drive to the West, 1938–1945: The Origins of the Cold War* (Stanford, 1995).

[9] For a comparison of Litvinov and Stalin see Jonathan Haslam, 'Litvinov, Stalin, and the Road Not Taken', in G. Gorodetsky (ed.), *Soviet Foreign Policy, 1917–1991* (London, 1994), pp. 55–62.

[10] O. N. Ken & A. I. Rupasov, *Politbyuro TsK VKP (B) i otnosheniya SSSR s Zapadnymi Sosednimi Gosudarstvami*, part 1 (St Petersburg, 2000), p. 66, n. 142.

[11] Surits to Narkomindel, very secret, 28 November 1939, *Dokumenty vneshnei politiki* (*DVP*), XXII, bk 2, p. 343.

[12] S. Z. Sluch, 'Rech' Stalina, kotoroi ne bylo', *Otechestvennaya istoriya*, 14, 1, 2004, pp. 113–139. I thank O. N. Ken for drawing this article to my attention.

[13] Banac, *Diary of Georgi Dimitrov*, pp. 115–116.

[14] Roberts, 'Stalin, the Pact with Nazi Germany, and the Origins of Postwar Soviet Diplomatic Historiography', pp. 94–95.

[15] For various examples see Alexander Dallin & F. I. Firsov (eds), *Dimitrov & Stalin, 1934–1943: Letters from the Soviet Archives* (New Haven, 2000).

[16] 'Record of a discussion which took place between the Prime Minister and a deputation from both Houses of Parliament on 28 July 1936', PRO, PREM 1/193.

[17] N. Chamberlain to his sister Ida, 29 March 1938, NC18/1/1042, University of Birmingham, N. Chamberlain Papers.

[18] A. M. Nekrich, *Pariahs, Partners, Predators: German–Soviet Relations, 1922–1941* (New York, 1997), pp. 51, 60 and passim.

[19] For example, excerpt from Litvinov's journal, meetings with [Rudolph] Nadolny [German ambassador in Moscow], 11 and 13 December 1933, AVPRF, f. 082, o. 17, p. 77, d. 1, ll. 6–2.

[20] William C. Bullitt, US ambassador in Moscow, to Cordell Hull, secretary of state, 7 March 1936, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1936*, I, pp. 212–213.

[21] Schulenburg to Foreign Ministry, Berlin, no. 76, 8 May 1935, *Documents on German Foreign Policy*, series C, IV, p. 138.

[22] Litvinov to Ya. Z. Surits, Soviet *polpred* in Berlin, 9 May 1935, *DVP*, XVIII, p. 323.

[23] Geoffrey Roberts, 'A Soviet Bid for Coexistence with Nazi Germany, 1935–1937: The Kandelaki Affair', *International History Review*, XVI, 3, August 1994, pp. 466–490.

[24] Litvinov to Surits, no. 337/L, secret, 4 December 1935, AVPRF, f. 082, o. 18, p. 80, d. 1, ll. 102–103; and also Litvinov to L. M. Kaganovich, Politburo member, no. 3702/L, secret, 14 September 1936, AVPRF, f. 05, o. 16, d. 1, p. 114, ll. 213–214.

[25] Litvinov to Stalin (copies to Molotov, Kaganovich, K. E. Voroshilov), no. 3693/L, very secret, 7 September 1936, AVPRF, f. 05, o. 16, d. 1, p. 114, ll. 193–196.

[26] For example, E. V. Girshfel'd, Soviet chargé d'affaires in Paris, to Potemkin, recently appointed deputy commissar for foreign affairs in Moscow, no. 183, secret, 26 April 1937, AVPRF, f. 011, o. 1, d. 76, p. 8, ll. 89–88. For an overview of the failed Soviet attempt to start staff talks see M. J. Carley, *1939: the Alliance that Never Was and the Coming of World War II* (Chicago, 1999), pp. 23–26; and more recently, Sabine Jansen, *Pierre Cot. Un anti-fasciste radical* (Paris, 2002), pp. 294–307.

[27] Ronald Campbell, British chargé d'affaires in Paris, to Edward Lord Halifax, foreign secretary, no. 225, 31 August 1938, *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, 3rd series, II, p. 194.

[28] 'From a record of conversation of ... S. S. Aleksandrovsky with ... E. Beneš', 2 and 3 May 1935, *Dokumenty i materialy po istorii Sovetsko–Chekhoslovatskikh otnoshenii*, III, pp. 106–107.

[29] From Politburo protocol no. 25, 4 May 1935, *Politbyuro TsK RKP(B) i Evropa: Resheniya "Osoboi Papki", 1923–1939* (Moscow, 2001), p. 326; see also O. N. Ken, 'Chekhoslovakiya v

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politike Moskvy (1932–1936gg.): Sovetsko–Chekhoslovatskoe sblizhenie (iyun' 1934–iyun' 1935g.)', *Rossiya XXI*, 11–12, 1996, pp. 82–112.

[30] Igor Lukes, *Czechoslovakia between Stalin and Hitler: the Diplomacy of Edvard Beneš in the 1930s* (New York, 1996), p. 229.

[31] Litvinov to Aleksandrovsky, 2 September 1938, *Dokumenty po istorii Myunkhenskogo sgovora, 1937–1939 (DIMS)* (Moscow, 1979), pp. 187–188.

[32] Aleksandrovsky to Narkomindel, 19 September 1938, *DVP*, XXI, pp. 498–499; and excerpt from Politburo protocol no. 64, 20 September 1938, *Politbyuro TsK RKP(B) i Evropa*, p. 363.

[33] *Ibid.*, note, pp. 363–364; Potemkin to Aleksandrovsky, 20 September 1938, *DVP, XXI*, p. 500; and excerpt from Aleksandrovsky to Narkomindel, 21 September 1938, *DIMS*, p. 244. Cf. Lukes, *Beneš*, p. 225.

[34] Lukes, *Beneš*, p. 223.

[35] *Ibid.*, pp. 223, 229; and Raack, *Stalin's Drive to the West*, pp. 18–21.

[36] Excerpt from Potemkin's journal, 'Conversation with … Fierlinger', no. 6449, secret, 22 September 1938, AVPRF, f. 0138, o. 19, d. 1, p. 128, ll. 69–70.

[37] Coulondre to Georges Bonnet, French foreign minister, nos. 710–712, 22 September 1938, *Documents diplomatiques français*, 2e série, XI, pp. 446–447.

[38] Cf. Zara Steiner, 'The Soviet Commissariat of Foreign Affairs and the Czechoslovakian Crisis in 1938: New Material from the Soviet Archives', *Historical Journal*, 42, 3, Autumn 1999, pp. 768–769.

[39] Excerpt from Potemkin's journal, 'Conversation with … Fierlinger', no. 6451, secret, 23 September 1938, AVPRF, f. 0138, o. 19, d. 1, p. 128, ll. 71–72.

[40] Telford Taylor, *Munich: The Price of Peace* (New York, 1979), p. 791; Steiner, 'Czechoslovakian Crisis', p. 767; and S. S. Alexandrovsky, 'Munich: Witness's Account', *International Affairs* (Moscow), 1988, 12, pp. 119–133.

[41] Hugh Ragsdale, *The Soviets, the Munich Crisis, and the Coming of World War II* (New York, 2004), pp. 111–126.

[42] Lukes, *Beneš*, p. 268, n. 111.

[43] Aleksandrovsky to Narkomindel, highest priority, transmitted by telephone, 22 September 1938, *DVP*, XXI, pp. 515–516; and 'Record of a conversation of the deputy commissar for foreign affairs with the Polish chargé d'affaires [Tadeusz] Jankowski', Potemkin, 23 September 1938, *DVP*, XXI, pp. 516–517.

[44] J. Haslam, 'Soviet–German Relations and the Origins of the Second World War: The Jury is Still Out', *Journal of Modern History*, 69, 4, December 1997, pp. 785–797.

[45] 'Record of conversation of … I. V. Stalin and … V. M. Molotov with the minister of foreign affairs of Turkey S. Saracoğlu', very secret, 1 October 1939, *DVP*, XXII, bk 2, pp. 146–153.

[46] Carley, *1939*, pp. 126–134.

[47] Surits to Molotov, no. 116, secret, 6 May 1939, AVPRF, f. 011, o. 4, d. 178, p. 32, ll. 98–95; Surits to Molotov, highest priority, very secret, 10 May 1939, *DVP*, XXII, bk 1, pp. 354–355; Potemkin (in Warsaw) to Molotov, highest priority, very secret, 10 May 1939, *DVP*, XXII, bk 1, pp. 352–354; and Maisky to Narkomindel, highest priority, very secret, 9 May 1939, *DVP*, XXII, bk 1, pp. 348–349.

[48] Litvinov to Surits, no. 4299/L, secret, 4 April 1939, AVPRF, f. 011, o. 4, d. 178, p. 32, ll. 40–39; and Litvinov to Surits, no 4236/L, secret, 19 March 1939, AVPRF, f. 0136, d. 912, p. 176, l. 30.

[49] For example, Peter Jackson, *France and the Nazi Menace: Intelligence and Policy Making, 1933–1939* (Oxford, 2000); and Talbot C. Imlay, *Facing the Second World War: Strategy, Politics, and Economics in Britain and France, 1938–1940* (Oxford, 2003).

[50] According to Imlay, *Facing the Second World War*, p. 46. Cf., 'Visite de Monsieur Souritz du 26 mai 1939, extrait des notes personnelles du Ministre des Affaires étrangères', Archives nationales, Paris, Papiers Daladier, 496 AP/13; and Surits to Narkomindel, highest priority, very secret, 26 May 1939, *DVP*, XXII, bk 1, p. 399.

[51] Gabriel Gorodetsky, *Grand Delusion: Stalin and the German Invasion of Russia* (New Haven, 1999), p. 279.

[52] Viktor Suvorov, *Icebreaker: Who Started the Second World War?* (London, 1990).

[53] Gorodetsky, *Grand Delusion*, p. 208.

[54] *Ibid.*, pp. 237–241.

[55] Resis, *Molotov Remembers*, pp. 22, 28.

[56] Jackson, *France and the Nazi Menace*, and Imlay, *Facing the Second World War*, are good examples. See Carley, *1939*, pp. xiii–xix, for more on the historiography of appeasement.

[57] Gorodetsky, *Grand Delusion*, p. 240.

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Dmitry P. Gorenburg, *Minority Ethnic Mobilization in the Russian Federation.* Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003, xiii + 297 pp., £50.00 ($75.00) h/b.

Dina Zisserman-Brodsky, *Constructing Ethnopolitics in the Soviet Union: Samizdat, Deprivation and the Rise of Ethnic Nationalism.* Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003, xi + 294 pp., £35.00 h/b.

Pål Kolstø (ed.), *National Integration and Violent Conflict in the Post-Soviet Societies: The Cases of Estonia and Moldova.* Oxford and Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002, xvi + 404 pp., £30.95 p/b.

ONE ASPECT OF THE DEMISE of the Soviet Union that has never stopped intriguing scholars is the Soviet project of modern ethno-nationalism, or Soviet nationality policy. The Soviet project that aimed to materialise *homo sovieticus* and modernise a suitable ethno-nationalist habitat could be read as a modern adaptation of Mary Shelley's Gothic fiction *Frankenstein.* In our adaptation the Soviet 'Frankenstein' put together and concocted an ethno-nationalist creature using the Marxist–Leninist material of nationhood and the empire preservation rationale of 'divide and rule'. Although the fiend's manifest function was benign, its latent function was destructive. During the Soviet experiment most analysts were optimistic and saw, or preferred to see, the gentle soul of the fiend. After the unexpected demise of the Soviet 'Frankenstein' there was no doubt that the creation was a savage wretch capable of driving its creator to annihilation. Most of the scholarly attention thereafter focused on explaining the wider context of the Soviet 'Frankenstein' and tried to show why the Soviet experiment was doomed to fail. The books under review, however, emphasise the urgency of learning how the fiend, ethno-nationalism, functioned and what legacy it left behind. Thus, they suggest a shift from the previous *why* questions to the critical *how* perspective.

The *how* perspective of *Constructing Ethnopolitics in the Soviet Union* investigates little known landscapes of civil society in the post-Khrushchev modernising USSR. After prolonged study of *samizdat* documents issued by nationalist movements, Zisserman-Brodsky attributes the emergence of nationalist dissent in the USSR to the conjunction of the social and political modernisation under Khrushchev and relative deprivation (p. 196). The more liberal Khrushchev regime generated the political opportunity structure (POS) in which dissent groups could emerge and operate. The relative deprivation element sees nationalist movements and political action as the outcomes of perceived frustrations by groups who felt deprived relative to others and handicapped in the social struggle for wealth, power, status and services. The development of ethno-nationalism in the Soviet Union could therefore be seen as the outcome of regional relative deprivation in the context of the opening window for political opportunities. Critical to this nexus, the study suggests, were dissent movements and their utilisation of *samizdat*, which from its inception took advantage of the POS and elaborated the motif of relative deprivation. Zisserman-Brodsky describes several ways in which dissent movements, through *samizdat*—then 'a free voice for the politically mobilised part of the nationalist intelligentsia' (p. 200), were crucial in initiating popular nationalist movements in the USSR during *perestroika*: they expressed the most popular ethnic claims and objectives; fostered social, cultural and political values that were aggregated by the people as 'age old aspirations'; and formulated a universal benchmark of ethnic political behaviour that was later successfully adopted by the mass nationalist movements.

Minority Ethnic Mobilization in the Russian Federation, on the other hand, tries to show *how* Soviet ethnic institutions affected the development of ethno-nationalism and the emergence of popular ethnic movements in Russia. While Zisserman-Brodsky's study employed a bottom-up approach of social movement theory, Gorenburg prefers a top-down institutionalist method in applying the same theory in his study of popular mobilisation. Gorenburg's work also criticises social movement theory's treatment of the POS as a country-level variable, and proposes its

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