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Making the Russian Bomb: From Stalin to Yeltsin

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Cochran, Thomas B., Robert S. Norris, and Oleg A. Bukharin. *Making the Russian Bomb: From Stalin to Yeltsin*. Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1995. 318pp. \$55

"Making the Russian Bomb, Trashing the Empire" might be a more appropriate title for this book. Global security requires concern not only about diminishing the warhead count but also about dealing with the environmental contamination legacy that resulted from nearly half a century of building the Russian nuclear arsenal. In addition to the production of a weapons stockpile that reached a peak of forty-five thousand warheads sometime around 1986, nuclear fuel-cycle activities and radioactive contamination from nuclear-powered vessels have created a vast waste area on land and seas throughout and around the former Soviet Union.

For example, the Russian navy dumped liquid and solid reactor waste in ten officially sanctioned areas in the Far Eastern seas, including six in the Sea of Japan south of Vladivostok, one in the Sea of Okhotsk, and three in the North Pacific Ocean southeast of the Kamchatka Peninsula. The radio-chemical plant at Tomsk-7 on the Tom River near the geographical center of Russia has a long history of accidents, from a condenser explosion in 1961 to an explosion with discharge of radioactive aerosols outside the plant in 1993. In 1957, the "Kyshtym disaster" resulted from a chemical explosion in a waste storage tank; some twenty mega-Curies (MC) of radioactivity was ejected. (By comparison, an estimated 50 to 150 MC of fission products were released from the Chernobyl accident.) The authors, who are members of the Natural Resources De-

fense Council, present a comprehensive account of the activities that have resulted from the Russian radioactive contamination problem. This book is an essential reference for those concerned with what needs to be done now.

However, the title is misleading. The history of the Russian Bomb is treated in a single, short chapter. The student interested in the historical development of the Russian nuclear weapon is referred to *Stalin and the Bomb: The Soviet Union and Atomic Energy, 1939-1956* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale Univ. Press, 1994). For its part, *Making the Russian Bomb* is an encyclopedic compendium of sources of radioactive waste and must be treated as such to be appreciated. The chapters do not have a common theme but rather are independent discussions of such topics as "An Overview of the Stockpile and Complex" and "Chelyabinsk-65/Mayak Chemical Combine."

The writing style may be difficult for readers unfamiliar with Russian geography. More extensive maps would have been useful. Also, the style and terminology are difficult. The addition of a glossary of acronyms and abbreviations would have been helpful. For example, it took considerable effort for me to realize that "Hm/y" meant "tons heavy metal per year" and that "Pbq" meant "penta-Becquerel," which is 10^{15} disintegrations per second.

I found the chapter "Tomsk-7 and Krasnoyarsk-26" interesting, because I had attended a physics conference at Tomsk in September 1993, shortly after a chemical accident; reading this book explained why I was able to find a personal microdosimeter for sale in a department store. Of particular interest to the Navy community is the final chapter, "Radioactive Contamination from Nuclear-Powered Vessels,"

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which describes the persistent dumping of radioactive waste in the Arctic region. To the authors' credit, this material comes from the comprehensive Russian report by Alexei V. Yablokov et al., "Facts and Problems Connected with the Disposal of Radioactive Waste in the Seas Adjacent to Our Territory," published in February 1993.

Although it is an important addition to our knowledge of activities in the former Soviet Union and the six appendices and extensive footnotes are invaluable, *Making the Russian Bomb* is a specialist's book. It is recommended for libraries and as a reference for scholars of nuclear weapons, nuclear waste, and the environment.

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McCauley, Martin. *Stalin and Stalinism*. London: Longman, 1995. 142pp. (No price given)

McCauley, Martin. *The Origins of the Cold War, 1941–1949*. London: Longman, 1995. 152pp. (No price given)

The serious reader will read perhaps three thousand books in a lifetime. This is not a great number, so every single volume matters. Especially on important issues, each book should enhance understanding rather than confuse. It follows, then, that there will be books to skip over. These, I submit, are two.

It is truly surprising that in the wake of the Soviet Union's demise—when even the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* now feel it safe to acknowledge that the USSR was a "totalitarian" state—there continue to be published histories that downplay what few now

dispute: the monstrous nature of the Soviet regime. If you wish to avoid such works, a few general rules of the road might help. You might, for example, simply stay away from authors who refer (unless with irony) to "legitimate Soviet security needs." You can safely steer clear of historians who describe the Soviet Union as an "extraordinary experiment." You would also do well to avoid works that purport to be "objective"—meaning that they will not stoop to "moral judgment." On all these counts, McCauley's books are guilty.

One hesitates to criticize the work of a historian who has worked as hard as Martin McCauley to synthesize an impressive amount of scholarship into two slim volumes. But I will overcome my reticence, as the flaws in these histories of Stalin's Russia and the beginnings of the Cold War greatly outweigh their virtues.

McCauley, who teaches at the University of London, is a frequent and cogent commentator on the current economic and social problems of the countries that emerged from the dissolution of the USSR and the Warsaw Pact. However, his historical treatments are quirky, and the quirkiness seems to be all in one direction—one that tends to muddle rather than illuminate the reader's understanding of the essence of Stalinism or of how the Cold War came about.

Both volumes are part of an ambitious series being published by Longman that covers British and world history from medieval times to the present. Both books have their good points. In *Stalin and Stalinism*, McCauley weaves together in a very small space much of the political, economic, and cultural histories of the Soviet Union under Stalin. In *The Origins of the Cold War* he attempts, with general success, to synthesize most of the historical inter-