Naval War College Review

Volume 46
Number 3 *Summer*

Article 12

1993

The Soviet Union after Perestroika: Change and Continuity

Lawrence E. Modisett

Follow this and additional works at: https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review

Recommended Citation

Modisett, Lawrence E. (1993) "The Soviet Union after Perestroika: Change and Continuity," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 46 : No. 3 , Article 12.
Available at: https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol46/iss3/12

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Naval War College Review by an authorized editor of U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. For more information, please contact repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu.

Ironically, even the abolition of serfdom worsened the military weakness of the state. A servile and virtually lifelong draft had created a large and cohesive force, but one that was clearly a separate society. The emancipation of the serfs and the development of a system of universal military service tended both toward the integration of the military with society at large and the development of reserve cadres, but at the cost of introducing into the military all the tensions and divisions of the larger civic culture. At key moments in 1905–1906 and in 1917 this meant that the army was not the unwavering support of the autocracy but itself a fulcrum of social discontent. As Fuller notes, "as was so often the case in Russian history, reform undertaken to strengthen the regime would eventually imperil its continued survival."

Finally, although the late imperial regime saw steady economic growth, the gap, both economically and technologically, between itself and the other major European states, Japan, and the United States yawned ever wider. Its communications and transportation infrastructure, as well as its technocratic culture, were simply insufficient to undertake any major external adventure. Because of this, one would have thought that the tsarist regime would have moderated its ambitions, perhaps engaged in some strategic withdrawal, and sought peace above all else. That it did not opened the way to the tragedy of general war and revolution.

It is always dangerous to draw exact parallels between an earlier historical evolution and present events in Russia. But it is equally clear that Russia's past presents cautionary messages for its current leadership. William Fuller has done a masterful job in elucidating what these messages might be.

Robert S. Wood
Naval War College

Institute for Foreign Policy Analysis. *The Soviet Union after Perestroika: Change and Continuity*. New York: Brassey's (US), 1991. $9.95

Presently, it is a common observation among specialists on the former Soviet Union that those who venture to write anything more ambitious than an Op-Ed piece risk seeing their thoughts hopelessly out of date before they appear in print. At first glance the present volume might appear to confirm that view, especially since the failed coup of August 1991, with all that event portended, occurred just as it was being published.

Such are the uncertainties still surrounding the ruins of Europe's last great empire that many of the questions and answers offered by these authors are as important today as they were when it still appeared that Gorbachev (or his conservative challengers) might yet, through a

combination of maneuvering and repression, hold the Union together and halt, or at least slow down, the processes corroding its cohesiveness and vitality.

One strength of this volume is the diversity of perspectives among its contributors: Paul Holman, Paul Craig Roberts, Karen LaFollette, John J. Dziak, Andrew F. Krepinevich, Jr., Fred F. Littlepage, Sergei Fedorenko, and Robert L. Pfaltzgraff, Jr.. It enables them to address the diverse aspects of the Soviet disintegration and its implications for the future. Holman, who has studied the Soviet Union for many years as an intelligence officer and academic, offers a useful analytical model that attributes its unraveling to three simultaneous upheavals: political, economic, and ethnic. He notes that the interaction among the three precludes any attempt to predict the future "by simple extrapolation of current trends."

Roberts is a conservative economist who gained policymaking experience in the Reagan administration. He and co-author Karen LaFollette argue in a thoughtful essay that the failure thus far of efforts made at economic reform is attributable to delay in privatizing, and that until private property is firmly institutionalized there can be no meaningful economic reform. Describing the de facto privatization now underway as former apparatchiks seize control of state assets, both authors see a parallel to the process of enclosures in Western Europe, whereby feudal use rights were converted into private property.

Dziak writes of the revolutionary implications arising from the loss of popular fear of the security organs in what had become a "counterintelligence state," and he speculates on the potential for mischief among communist holdovers in the security apparatuses of the Eastern European countries.

Krepinevich and Littlepage present a farsighted analysis of how the collapse of the Soviet Union is changing Europe's security structure. They note that any future U.S. role will have to be played among a constellation of newly influential institutions, including the Council on Security and Cooperation in Europe, the European Community, the Western European Union, and "designer" subregional groupings such as the "Pentagonal," the Nordic Council, and the Council on Security and Cooperation in the Mediterranean.

Fedorenko has perhaps the most unique perspective. He operated for years within the Soviet apparatus and, more recently, has studied its failings from the vantage point of Western academia. He warns that political and economic reform face an uphill struggle in an environment that lacks the American "heritage of democratic traditions and sophisticated political culture," but he also notes a "solid consensus" across Soviet society that national survival depends upon joining the democratic mainstream. Fedorenko chides the United States for failing (six years after the onset of

perestroika) to develop a strategic "master plan," although he does acknowledge that doing so would require solving a long list of complex problems.

Pfaltzgraff, in a prescriptive essay that unfortunately focuses almost exclusively on the failings of Gorbachev, nonetheless offers some still-cogent reasons not to assume that a strategic threat to the U. S. can never again emanate from the territory of our former adversary.

Indeed, if there is a common theme among these essays, it is the need for the United States not to underestimate the potential challenges to Western security interests that may emerge from the current turmoil, whether in the form of: a resurgent, expansionist Russia; out-of-area threats to Nato interests; or of millions of refugees fleeing civil and economic chaos, straining, perhaps fatally, the fragile democratic infrastructures of Eastern Europe. For those charged with devising policies to meet these potential challenges, or simply with advancing public understanding of how they have arisen, this book is a useful tool.

LAWRENCE E. MODISETT
Naval War College

Bullock, Allan. *Hitler and Stalin: Parallel Lives*. New York: Knopf, 1992. 1,082pp. $35

Notwithstanding the measured optimism to be found in the conclusion to this work, Bullock's weighty study of the butchery unleashed by these two tyrants constitutes a *fin de siecle* examination of its main event—the battle between millenarian Nazi racism and chiliastic Soviet socialism. Bullock, long familiar with German sources (his *Hitler: A Study in Tyranny* received critical acclaim in the early 1960s), appears current and well acquainted also with the secondary literature pertaining to Stalin. Consequently, what the reader finds in this book is a lengthy, sometimes pedestrian, but often engaging examination of "one of the blackest periods in Europe's history."

Both dictators were narcissists suffering from paranoia. Stalin trusted no one and was determined to avenge every wrong done to him, however minor. Hitler believed that the Jews and Bolsheviks were behind every problem. It was only later that his paranoia spread to include his fellow Nazis, and he attributed Germany's military reversals to internal enemies of the Third Reich. Nevertheless, each despot possessed a unique gift that permitted him to achieve great power over a dazed and dislocated people.

Stalin used his position as General Secretary and his organizational talents to place officials beholden to him into important positions, thereby assuring the necessary "votes" before he challenged other luminaries in the Party. He then utilized the support of the Right to destroy the "Left Opposition," then co-opted the policies of the Left and turned on his former allies. As Stalin's power increased, he