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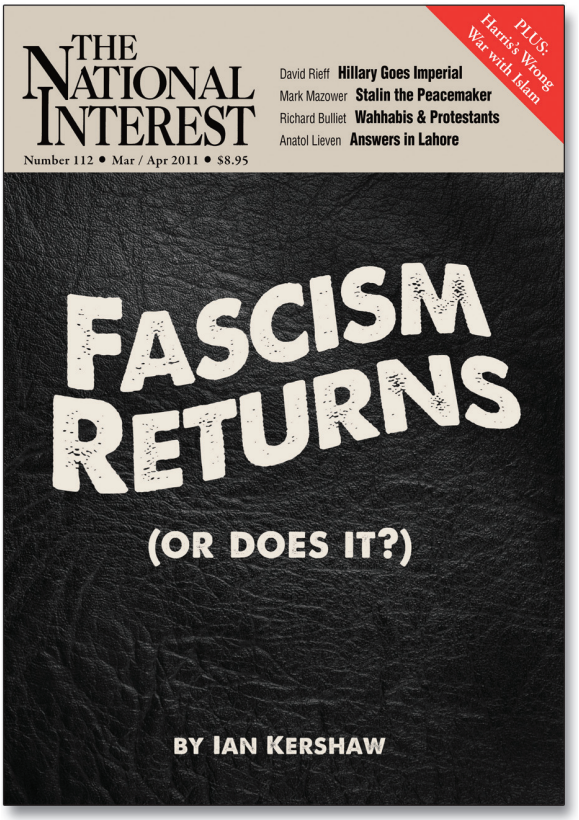


EDITOR *Justine A. Rosenthal*

The National Interest • 1615 L Street, N.W. • Suite 1230 • Washington, D.C. 20036
Phone (202) 467-4884 • Fax (202) 467-0006 • editor@nationalinterest.org

# Only Don't Call Me Comrade

*By Mark Mazower*

**Jonathan Haslam**, *Russia's Cold War: From the October Revolution to the Fall of the Wall* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011), 544 pp., $38.00.

**Silvio Pons and Robert Service**, eds., *A Dictionary of 20th-Century Communism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), 944 pp., $99.50.

One might have thought that the end of the Cold War would lead to a rapid reappraisal of the origins, nature and meaning of that strangely amorphous conflict. Yet this did not happen in any immediate sense, and initial access to long-coveted Soviet files did not generate much in the way of fresh basic insights. *We Now Know*, the title of a book published in 1997 by the dean of U.S. Cold War historians, John Lewis Gaddis, promised more than it delivered: the new knowledge, as reviewers pointed out at the time, looked awfully like the old. It was, to paraphrase Gaddis, pretty much all Joseph Stalin's fault, although one could trace back an underlying antagonism between the United States and Russia far into the nineteenth century. Stalin was a ruthless dictator presiding over an authoritarian regime, dedicated to building the wrong kind of empire. Fortunately, he was confronted by America, which was ready to build one of the right sort. Stalin started it; Washington fought back in the name of freedom. And thank goodness it did. What was surprising in all this was certainly not the interpretation—familiar to readers of Gaddis's earlier work. It was rather that the opening of the Soviet archives, and the spate of memoirs and other firsthand accounts that emerged in Russia in the 1990s, had apparently done so little to shift our basic historical terms of understanding.

But as the years pass, things have begun to change. Communism is now less a matter of politics and more of history. At the same time, scholars of U.S. foreign policy, of European diplomacy and of Soviet Russia have begun to read one another's work and have learned that they have interests in common. A special contribution to this process has been made by historians from Europe, as these two books testify. Perhaps not coincidentally, the Cold War looks from the Soviet perspective much more like a conflict over the Continent than it once did. In fact, both books under consideration suggest that there was only one global power—and that it was not the USSR: Soviet priorities were more traditional (more bounded) and less far-reaching than those of their principal, and much more powerful, transatlantic antagonist.

**Mark Mazower** is the Ira D. Wallach Professor of World Order Studies and a professor of history at Columbia University. His latest book is *No Enchanted Palace: The End of Empire and the Ideological Origins of the United Nations* (Princeton University Press, 2009).

The shift in perceptions starts with the question of when it all began. Plenty of answers to the timing of the Cold War's origins have been offered in the past: between 1944 and 1948 has been the usual response, though more ideologically inclined writers sometimes plausibly suggested looking to 1917–1921 and the clash between President Woodrow Wilson and Soviet leader Vladimir Lenin. Those who took the very long view even pushed things back to Pan-Slavism, imperial autocracy or—but could the Cold War really have been their fault?—the Mongols. What was not taken seriously enough, despite or maybe because of the regime's emphasis on the topic, was the rather obvious idea that its roots were located in the experience of the Second World War, the German invasion and occupation, and the deaths of millions of Soviet citizens.

One of the things that emerges from the very start of Cambridge professor Jonathan Haslam's readable, assiduously researched but old-fashioned account is the searing importance of the Great Patriotic War. (His title promises to take the story back to the Soviet Revolution, but by page eight we are already firmly lodged in 1939.) For Stalin and his foreign minister, Vyacheslav Molotov, the German invasion in 1941 confirmed the deep foreboding of the threat from the West they had felt at least since the early 1930s. And it cemented their suspicions thereafter. In Haslam's account, everything, it is little exaggeration to say, revolves around the German question—right up to the very end. Almost everything else—certainly most of the vaunted global Cold War in Africa and the Middle East—is a sideshow. For the memory of the war galvanized not only the Stalin generation but also those that followed. On October 26, 1962, at the height of the Cuban missile crisis, Uncle Joe's successor Nikita Khrushchev reminded President John F. Kennedy that he had "participated in two wars and I know that war ends when it has rolled through cities and villages, everywhere sowing death and destruction." As for future Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev, he shored up his own relationship with Khrushchev when they both served in the Ukraine, while Brezhnev's successor, Yuri Andropov, had fought in the partisan movement on the

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Karelian front during World War II. At their critical meeting in Moscow in 1990, the last president of the USSR, Mikhail Gorbachev, stressed to German Chancellor Helmut Kohl how much the world had changed since the war. That he could even say so was surely connected to the fact that he was the first Soviet leader without direct wartime experience. Would any of his predecessors have had such a sanguine attitude to the prospect of German reunification?

The probable division of Europe into spheres of influence was foreseen in 1944 by a few percipient observers—men like "Long Telegram" author, eventual U.S. ambassador to the USSR and father of containment George Kennan and Maksim Litvinov, a Russian revolutionary, Soviet foreign-affairs chief and, briefly, ambassador to the United States. It was that summer that Operation Bagration—the Red Army's awesome onslaught against the Wehrmacht on the eastern front—not only drove the Germans out of the pre-1939 Soviet territories but also brought whole swaths of new land in Eastern Europe under Stalin's control. One doubts that Stalin had anticipated the sheer speed of his troops' advance any more than the Nazis did, or indeed the British and Americans, struggling as they were out of their Normandy beachhead. While Soviet tanks rolled into Poland and Romania, fifty-seven thousand German prisoners of war were marched through the Russian capital in a kind of Roman triumph, and Western diplomats scrambled to come to terms with the new realities in Eastern Europe.

Realpolitik was endemic in the British Foreign Office—it was the diplomatic corollary of military weakness—and Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden and Prime Minister Winston Churchill rushed to Moscow to work out a temporary understanding, the famous percentages agreement. In Washington, things took much longer: whatever President Franklin D. Roosevelt's private reservations, the official line was to hope that the evil days of the Old Diplomacy had gone away, and to wish for the continuation of the wartime alliance into the peace. As for Moscow, spheres of influence were the only obvious answer—given the strength of anti-Communist and anti-Russian sentiment in Eastern Europe—to the security concerns that were uppermost in Stalin's mind. He too wondered whether the wartime alliance would survive their imposition. Stalin certainly believed for a while that it might.

And then there was the issue of how actually to consolidate Soviet influence in the region—an essentially political task. One can only imagine the intensity of the ideological arguments waged in Moscow over this all-important question. Haslam tells us frustratingly little about these, and indeed spends scant time on ideological matters in general. (We get more in *A Dictionary of 20th-Century Communism* from University of Rome professor Silvio Pons and Oxford scholar Robert Service, a work which is more attuned to issues of ideology.) In any case, we know the general outcome: advocates of immediate revolution were told to back off from attempting violent takeover, on Stalin's orders, and the construction of people's democracies (whatever that meant would be determined by events) proceeded, essentially continuing the line first devel-

oped in the 1930s of a broad front against the enemies of socialism.

Indeed, what emerges is a counter-traditional-narrative version of Russian power. The Communist agenda it turns out was not particularly seditious—nor was it particularly well thought out. Three things became clear quite quickly. First, far from being a revolutionary so far as Europe was concerned, Stalin was in fact to a surprising degree the protector of the order established at Versailles in 1919. With some reservations of course—and not marginal to those concerned—Poland was shrunk and shoved westward; the Baltic states were incorporated into the USSR; and Bessarabia was taken back from Romania. But all of this was no more than his czarist predecessors would have wished, and he was restrained in comparison to them. Unlike Catherine the Great or Alexander I, Stalin did not wipe Poland off the map, and he respected Finnish sovereignty once he was satisfied that he and the Finnish political elite understood one another. As Haslam reminds us, Stalin blocked the Allies' idea of creating large federations in Central and Eastern Europe because he regarded these (with some reason) as inherently anti-Soviet in purpose. So nation-states remained, and indeed became more homogeneous thanks to Soviet sponsorship of the forced expulsions and population transfers that continued well after the war ended.

Why Stalin chose not to push the frontiers of the USSR further west than he did is an interesting and neglected question. Because the consequence of his policy was to rule through delegation, he entrusted much of the initiative in Europe to the politically inexperienced cadres of Communists and fellow travelers who were thrust into power. Nationalism, then, complicated obedience to Moscow. The room for future misunderstandings—between the Kremlin and its Eastern European satraps, between both and Washington—was vast. Indeed, the scale of the domestic-political challenge in Eastern Europe facing anyone trying to install a pro-Soviet regime in one of the most anti-Soviet regions on earth was immense. Stalin may have won his sphere of influence by force of arms; but arms alone, even with the help of a rapidly expanded secret police, would not suffice to keep reliable governments in power. How to win the political battle, especially outside Yugoslavia, was made more complicated by the fact that by 1947 Communist parties across Europe had squandered any of the capital they might have won through their resistance to the Germans. In Eastern Europe, in short, there was an occupation but no master plan for the seizure of power.

The second point is that there was no single Soviet policy toward Eastern Europe—and there did not need to be. The question of Germany was the alpha and omega of Moscow's Cold War. Because controlling the former Reich was critical, a reliably obedient Poland was essential. Romania, the other vital springboard for the Wehrmacht's Barbarossa invasion in 1941, was also strategically critical. Other parts of Central and Eastern Europe mattered less: Austria and Hungary, for instance; and the primary task for the Yugoslavs—which they spectacularly failed to carry out—was to keep the Bal-


kans quiet, to avoid provoking the British and the Americans, and above all not to encourage the Greek Communists in their bid to seize power by force. The real radical in 1945–46 was not Stalin but Yugoslav dictator Josip Tito, determined to use the partisan triumph as the catalyst for a much more radical reshaping of the Balkans than Stalin desired.

Above all, perhaps, Stalin—like every other great statesman of the 1940s—was in his Eurocentrism a man of the nineteenth century: Europe was what counted; the rest—with the possible exception of East Asia—came a distant second. Whatever the ideological tug of Communist internationalism or the anticolonial dreams of Leninism, Stalin had no global mission in mind as the war ended. Europe was whence the chief threat had come; Europe would be the chief battleground in future, whichever capitalist power triumphed in the West. Not only had Stalin wound up the Comintern in 1943, but he turned out to be—regardless of the contemporary fears in Washington—a lot less forceful with Turkey and Iran than were his czarist predecessors.

This is the thrust of Haslam's account and one of its most interesting and important contributions: for the USSR, the Cold War was a European affair. Not, to be sure, that he denies or downplays the increasingly global character of the confrontation. But he never loses sight of the centrality of the Continent, and the global Cold War, as he describes it, looks more of an afterthought, or at any rate a series of opportunistic probes and parries, than any kind of sustained strategy for world hegemony. This makes for a mostly implicit but persuasive critique of much of that recent Cold War history which has emphasized the global dimension of the superpower standoff.

The global Cold War—unlike that in Europe—was a pretty lopsided battle. Truth be told, there was only ever one genuinely worldwide power after 1945. Right from the start, the Russians—20 million dead, their old industrial and mining centers devastated, a second famine in four years sweeping the western provinces—were worried when they realized that their primary opposition would come not from the fading British (so feeble they could not even take on the Germans on the Continent without help) but from the ascendant and largely untouched wartime economic powerhouse across the Atlantic. The Russians read the runes in Washington and London, helped as we now know by a superb intelligence network. Stalin became convinced the Americans would not retreat into isolationism a second time because to do so would condemn them to a repeat of the stagnation of the early 1930s. The dropping of the atomic bomb only strengthened Stalin's resolve not

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to be bossed around—especially in Europe. Attack being the best form of defense in his mind, Stalin started to test President Harry Truman's resolve. It was not only George Kennan who felt his countrymen needed to wake up. Maksim Litvinov, now sidelined, paced his Moscow apartment muttering: "You've got to bully the bully."

Once Washington did respond, it went much further than the Man of Steel had anticipated, and the new American will to global power asserted itself with a vengeance. The Truman Doctrine may have been designed for Europe and the Near East, but its message resonated further afield. The loss of China brought East and Southeast Asia into play, and by the 1950s, the United States was retooling intellectually and strategically for an unprecedented investment of economic, diplomatic and military energies across the world. It took over from Britain in the Middle East—initially through Israel rather than the Arab states London had preferred—and it succeeded the French and the Dutch in Southeast Asia. As for Africa, even in the 1940s there was only one superpower in the Belgian Congo and it certainly wasn't the USSR. While Stalin dreamed of a foothold (which never amounted to anything) in the Maghreb, Washington was settling in. Under Truman, Defense Secretary James Forrestal's massive expansion of the navy, and the simultaneous growth of the air force as a third independent service, testified to the scale of the commitment. So did the investment in social-science expertise and foreign-language training in the universities, the creation and expansion of the CIA, and the emergence of development theory and foreign aid as tools of diplomacy. Moscow was more than a decade behind.

Considering that the Cold War is universally seen as a superpower duel, scholars have been oddly loath to provide data to compare the two protagonists' standing and performance. But if by 1960 a missile gap had opened up so alarmingly in America's favor—and this in an area where the USSR was heavily funded—one can only imagine the scale of the disparity that existed in other kinds of investment—not to mention in basic GNP. Haslam indicates the extent to which the Soviets felt they lagged behind in global intelligence. Aid does not figure into his account, but we know from other sources that it was relatively small, mostly bilateral (multilateral assistance was a Free World phenomenon) and heavily concentrated in order to buy the loyalty of the few non-European members of the socialist camp.

In short, the USSR was—if not "Upper Volta with missiles" as former–West German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt once famously described it—then certainly far more limited in its global opportunities than the United States: it simply lacked the resources, the infrastructure and perhaps even the ideological commitment. Haslam sees this as the consequence of the USSR making foreign relations an affair of the state rather than of the party. But it still needs to be explained why Moscow did not take its global role more seriously.

The fundamental problem for the Kremlin—indeed the basic doctrinal ambiguity the regime faced from the start—was the deeply indeterminate relationship

between nineteenth-century Marxism and the consolidation of twentieth-century Soviet power. How to balance the larger ideological program with fears of potential challengers run amok? And here Pons and Service's *Dictionary* is an enormous help.

By the 1930s, Stalin had come to view what had happened in the USSR as a remarkable stroke of fortune; other Communist parties therefore needed to take a gradualist approach to the seizure of power. This underpinned his whole strategy toward people's democracy in Eastern Europe, and it shaped his policy further afield as well. When Mao Tse-tung visited Moscow after taking power in China, he was puzzled that Stalin pointedly refused even to address him as "comrade"; the *vozd* only grudgingly conceding Mao's right to the title at the very end of his visit.

To put the matter crudely, Stalin and his successors seemed to doubt that anywhere else was ready for, or perhaps even capable of, the right kind of revolution. The triumphs of Mao and others left the Kremlin suspicious and anxious, both about the threat they posed to Moscow's own ideological leadership of the socialist bloc, and about the revolutionary adventurism which so easily propelled events in directions inimical to the interests of the USSR. Haslam's account of the Korean War shows how much Soviet policy was shaped by anxiety about China. It would hardly be going too far to say that Stalin acquiesced in North Korea's poorly-thought-through aggression only to drive a wedge between Mao and the Americans: in this respect if in no other, of course, he was brilliantly successful.

Paradoxically, the rise of China introduced another check on Soviet global ambitions, for the United States faced no comparable complication in its alliances as it consolidated its own grip over the Free World. Inferior in military and economic terms to Moscow, Beijing nevertheless increasingly represented a pole of attraction for other socialist states. Albanian dictator Enver Hoxha's Maoist moment did not deeply trouble the Russians; Poland's long-running flirtation with China did. A helpful article in the *Dictionary* on the conferences of international Communist parties that were organized by the Kremlin for about a decade after the 1956 Hungarian Uprising in order to orchestrate public demonstrations of socialist unity in fact reveals how fragile the Soviet grip was over the worldwide Communist movement. A series of now scarcely remembered and painfully prepared meetings, designed to check challengers to Moscow and to reaffirm the country's hegemony, failed miserably in their purpose. By the early 1960s, the socialist camp (to give it its Soviet name) was falling apart. And although Cuba and Vietnam joined it, and Outer Mongolia stayed in to irritate the Chinese, its core always remained an (Eastern) European one. One need hardly belabor the basic point: The core alliances built up by Washington brought into its orbit the most developed or rapidly developing economies of the postwar world—in particular, Western Europe and Japan. The core alliance for the USSR was based on fitfully industrializing Eastern European states, classic minor lands between.

But the Kremlin fared little better in harnessing allies to the cause (or at least the Moscow-led alliance) when it turned more completely away from Communism toward what Gorbachev called "the progressive community of the world." The *Dictionary* pays eloquent if understated homage to the dismal fate of international Communist parties. If the Cold War was supposed to help them, in fact it had the opposite effect. Some rather useful entries on the global array of these parties confirm Haslam's point: the USSR did not regard them as assets of any significance, and Moscow did not spend too much time on them. Even where anticolonialism and/or anti-Americanism ought to have put wind in their sails, these parties failed to capitalize, losing out to other forces on the center-left—when they were not actually crushed by coups or dictatorships. In South America, they splintered and fragmented, squandering the enormous intellectual capital that Marxism possessed south of the Rio Grande. In the Arab world, which should have been equally fertile territory, and where in 1919 Lenin was hailed as a more sympathetic world leader than Woodrow Wilson, postwar Communist parties fell afoul of dynasts or of military strongmen and nationalist political parties. Stalin, of course, had been one of the greatest destroyers of the international Communist movement—devastating the Polish party in particular during the purges. After 1945, he and his successors—and here Haslam's focus on state-to-state diplomacy makes sense—looked naturally to work with whomever was in power in the Third World: Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir, Indian leader Jawaharlal Nehru, Indonesian President Sukarno. It helped if they had, or at least professed, leftist sympathies, but this was dispensable. Moscow's attitude was not that Marxist ideology had become irrelevant; but the Soviets did regard it as largely irrelevant to the USSR's world position, at least in the here and now, since they saw only the most limited historical role for Communist parties in such backward countries. This was but another sign of the nineteenth-century outlook of the Cold War Kremlin.

Yet the turn away from the Communist movement, realistic though it may have been, brought Soviet diplomacy no great success. The writing was on the wall from very early on. India and Israel fostered Stalin's hopes that they might become allies with the deliberate mood music orchestrated by those countries' early leaders. Both quickly disappointed him. So far as Israel was concerned, his plan to turn it into a reliable ally in the Middle East to counter the British-created Arab League failed miserably; it was rather late in the day, long after Stalin's death, that the Kremlin decided to bank on the Baathists and others instead. But Syria and Iraq and North Yemen were scarcely a powerful lineup when set alongside the array of U.S.-funded allies, sympathizers or clients in the region. As for India, the Communist Party was torn over tactics, split into factions and never managed to convert success in strongholds like Kerala or West Bengal into a coherent national strategy.

Vietnam was, of course, the one victory, despite the Soviet Union getting heavily involved only after the Americans had gone


in. Even there, the Kremlin under Khrushchev was chiefly anxious that the conflict not derail the ongoing détente with the West. It was the Chinese who provided the principal support for the North until the United States began to bomb North Vietnamese territory. At that point, the USSR became deeply involved, stepping up aid and military deliveries. Yet the Soviets still lived in fear, lest Vietnam lead to a wider conflict with the West, and worked hard behind the scenes to bring the war to an end.

Moreover, success—such as it was—in Vietnam has to be weighed in the balance alongside the unambiguous failure in Indonesia at the same time. The Indonesian Communist Party was Asia's first. By the early 1960s, it was the largest Communist Party in the world in terms of membership apart from those in Russia and China. Moreover, its strategy of cooperation with Sukarno's Nationalists brought it real power. But the USSR could claim little of the credit for any of these achievements, and in 1965 it stood aside as General Suharto, with a nod and a wink from Washington, led a military coup against Sukarno and the Communists—a coup that killed between half a million and a million people. The party itself was destroyed.

One closes both these books wondering whether Communism had very much to do with Soviet policy in the Cold War. French leader Charles de Gaulle once pointedly referred to Russia rather than to the USSR on a visit to Moscow; this annoyed his hosts not because it got things wrong but because it underscored an uncomfortable truth. Haslam's reference to *Russia*'s Cold War suggests something similar. In his account, Communist rulers in the Kremlin were simply obeying the older logic of the struggle for mastery in Europe. He offers vivid insights into the ideological uncertainties that beset the leadership at almost every turn; but on the whole he tells the story in the idiom of the diplomatic historians of past generations. In this respect, the *Dictionary of 20th-Century Communism* is rather different. Its entries are mostly very thorough and informative, and if one or two are written in a language that reflects the jargon of its subject, that is a small price to pay for an approach usefully empathetic to its unempathetic protagonists. Both books take a global approach to their subject; but both suggest that in Soviet eyes, the Cold War was never really a global struggle. Europe was the heartland. It was 1989, not 1945, that brought the European era to an end. □