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Introduction by William Keylor

Michael Jabara Carley. *Silent Conflict. A Hidden History of Early Soviet-Western Relations.*

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Introduction by William Keylor, Boston University

Last summer, as President Vladimir Putin annexed the Crimea (with its Russian-speaking majority) and began to apply pressure on Ukraine (with its Russian-speaking minority), I was completing my reading of Michael Carley's book *Silent Conflict* in preparation for the H-Diplo roundtable on his book that I was asked to introduce. Foreign affairs specialists in the West have debated the true motivations of the current Russian strongman for undertaking this daring set of foreign policies. Is he a pragmatic realist defending his country's vital national interests against a U.S.-backed European Union intent on luring Ukraine into the West's orbit at Russia's expense with the siren song of market capitalism and political democracy? Or is he a Russophile ideologue driven by a messianic belief in the mission of expanding his country's borders as far westward as possible?

For the last six decades a similar debate among historians of the Soviet Union has focused on the goals of that country's leadership and the means by which it sought to achieve them. The historiography of the Stalin-Truman era (1945-1953) is replete with scholarly disputes about the origins of the Cold War. Orthodox historians defend President Harry Truman and diplomat and policy adviser George Kennan's doctrine of containment as an appropriate response to an expansionist, ideologically-driven superpower intent on conquering Western Europe and Asia as the first steps toward the triumph of Communism throughout the world. The revisionists countered by portraying Stalin as a pragmatic realist who pursued traditional Russian foreign-policy goals while paying lip service to the cause of world revolution.

Michael Carley certainly qualifies as the preeminent revisionist historian of Soviet foreign policy for the period from the Bolshevik Revolution to the advent of the Second World War. His book on the French military intervention in the Russian Civil War was his first contribution to the revisionist literature.¹ His second book leapfrogged over the 1920s to focus on Soviet foreign policy and the Western response to it in the 1930s—which, following W. H. Auden, he derisively called the “low, dishonest decade.”² In that book he paints a vivid portrait of a pragmatic, realist Stalin intent on forging an alliance with Britain and France against Nazi Germany only to be thwarted by the visceral anti-Communist ideologues among the ruling elites of those two countries, who were more interested in appeasing than in opposing Adolf Hitler. For him, the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of August 1939 was not the cynical and shameful betrayal of the anti-fascist front, as many scholarly studies in the West have claimed. It was instead Stalin's plan B after he learned (or thought he learned) that the USSR's potential allies in the West were incapable of overcoming their

¹ Michael J. Carley, *Revolution & Intervention: The French Government and the Russian Civil War, 1917-1919* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 1983).

² See also “End of the ‘Low, Dishonest Decade’: Failure of the Anglo-Franco-Soviet Alliance in 1939,” *Europe-Asia Studies*, 45:2 1993, 303-341.

fanatical anti-Communism in the interests of containing the Third Reich.³ Underlying both books is the argument that the Cold War between Soviet Russia and the West began not in 1947-48 but rather in the years following the October Revolution and continued right up to the advent of the Second World War.

Carley now returns to the 1920s to apply his revisionist perspective to the period before there was a Hitler to deal with. The topic of Soviet foreign policy in the 1920s has received much less scholarly attention than has the 1930s and the post-World War II period. Carley has done the profession a great service by his dogged search for archives in the unwelcoming labyrinth of the unpublished Soviet records. His close reading of the heavily edited documentary collections that the Kremlin has allowed to be published, supplemented by his own personal excavations in Moscow, has unearthed a veritable treasure trove of primary-source material that had long gone unexploited. This archival digging, coupled with similar investigations in the relevant records in London, Paris, and Washington, has produced a provocative reassessment of the history of relations between the Soviet Union and the Western powers in the decade after the end of the Great War.

The theoretical approach of the book under review is the familiar model of 'bureaucratic politics.' Decision-making in most governments is the fruit of vigorous debate among a small coterie of officials within the inner sanctum. In the case of the formulation of foreign policy in the Soviet Union in the twenties, that inner sanctum was the Politburo. Most of the government ministries, including the Narkomindel, were out of the loop. Several commentators note, as does Carley himself, that the Commissar for Foreign Affairs, unlike his counterparts in Western nations, was not a regular participant in discussions in the key decision-making body—the Politburo-- that resulted in policy. If Georgy Chicherin and his deputy (and eventual successor) Maxim Litvinov were excluded from the decision-making process, then one is entitled to ask why their role should receive the careful attention that Carley accords it. Their utterances and pronouncements that Carley has unearthed in the archives might be discounted as the mere expression of their frustration at being marginalized.

Richard Overy argues that Carley "plays down too much the role of ideology by emphasizing the confusion, flexibility, and Machiavellianism of the regime. If the old-fashioned Cold-War view of the Soviet Union now no longer matches the historical reality," he warns, "the baby should not be thrown out with the proverbial bath water. This *was* a revolutionary state, and Western anxieties about the prospect of Communist subversion were not all fantasies." Indeed, the image one is left with from Carley of the one institution whose sole purpose was to extend the Communist system beyond the borders of the new Soviet state—the Comintern--is of an essentially a rogue entity flamboyantly promoting world revolution while the pragmatists in the Narkomindel earnestly sought trade contacts and diplomatic agreements with the very capitalist regimes that Bolshevik ideology demonized as class enemies to be crushed. (If so, one is entitled to ask why the Comintern

³ Michael J. Carley, *1939: The Alliance that Never Was and the Coming of World War II* (Chicago, 1999). See also the H-Diplo Roundtable on the book, published in 2000.

officials Grigory Zinoviev and Nikolai Bukharin were in regular attendance at Politburo meetings whereas Chicherin and Litvinov were excluded except for special occasions).

It is, of course, possible to square the circle by distinguishing between short-term and long-term objectives. Vladimir Lenin (with his New Economic Policy) and Stalin (with his eager acceptance of Western technology and expertise to facilitate his crash program of industrialization) may have both retained a deeply felt commitment to the eventual triumph of Bolshevism throughout the world while playing the diplomatic and commercial card for short-term gain. In short, the tension between the Party and Comintern, on the one hand, and the Foreign Ministry, on the other hand, may simply have been not so much a “silent conflict” between ideologues with a messianic vision of liberating oppressed humanity and pragmatists intent on promoting the state’s vital interests as a dispute about tactics among those who shared the ultimate strategic objective of a Communist world. The famous old saw attributed to Lenin that “The Capitalists will sell us the rope with which we will hang them” is worth recalling.

Along similar lines, Jonathan Haslam faults Carley for failing to recognize that “Diplomacy was the secondary policy, the back-up when the main policy failed.” He calls attention to the abortive attempts in the first half of the twenties to destabilize governments such as those of Weimar Germany, Poland, and Bulgaria--with which the Kremlin conducted normal state-to-state relations-- that contradicted the Narkomindel’s patient efforts to regularize diplomatic relations with the West. He also wonders why Carley insists on painting hard-liners in Britain such as Winston Churchill, George Curzon, and Lord Birkenhead as anti-Bolshevik fanatics while ignoring the real efforts of the Comintern to promote violent revolution abroad. He speculates that the division of labor in the Soviet leadership beginning in Lenin’s years enabled it to claim “plausible deniability” when a revolutionary policy was pursued on the side. The Narkomindel officials could confidentially complain about Comintern hotheads as they assiduously sought to smooth the ruffled feathers of irate Western diplomats. In short, Haslam agrees with Overy that the “good cop, bad cop” tactic served the interests of a foreign-policy-making apparatus that was much more monolithic than Carley believes. Haslam’s comment that “one could see even into the 1930s how Party opinion tried to scupper collective security and prompted Stalin to hold back from committing to French defence policy,” is certain to attract Carley’s attention, since his previous book on the 1930s held Paris (and Britain) rather than Moscow responsible for the failure to form a tripartite alliance to deter Hitler.

It is somewhat ironic that Alexi Filitov, the only Russian participant in this forum, is also the only commentator who focusses on those portions of Carley’s book that deal with the “silent conflict” within the foreign ministries of the three Western powers treated in this study. He credits Carley for unearthing new evidence exonerating British Foreign Secretary Austen Chamberlain from the customary claim that he was fully in full agreement with the Tory diehards led by Churchill and Birkenhead who opposed any agreements with Moscow. Filitov expresses mild regret that Carley confined his study of “the West” to the big three (Britain, France, and the United States), ignoring relations between the Soviet Union and the newly independent countries of Eastern and Southern Europe. One should not fault the book for the comparative paucity of attention to Weimar Germany, whose bilateral

relationship with the USSR has been exhaustively treated by other scholars. Filitov expresses admiration for Carley's successful plumbing of the Foreign Ministry and Party archives, while Haslam complains that he has barely scratched the surface of the Comintern records.

Notwithstanding their various caveats, all three commentators acknowledge the extraordinary feat of primary-source research in three languages that makes Carley's book indispensable reading for anyone interested in studying the foreign relations of the Soviet Union with the three main capitalist countries from the Bolshevik Revolution to the end of the 1920s. One may express reservations about the major conclusions that Carley draws from his careful study of the relevant records, as Haslam and Overy have done in this forum. But one is obliged to tip one's hat at this indefatigable detective work that has brought to light hitherto obscure bits of evidence about the way in which Soviet foreign policy was devised and implemented in the decade after the Great War. Carley is headed to Moscow to continue his dogged mining of the relevant archives for a study of the formation and operation of the Grand Alliance in the Second World War. It will be interesting to learn about the conclusions he draws about the Soviet Union's relations with its two English-speaking allies during a period when the Comintern faded and then disappeared altogether and the Narkomindel was headed by an obsequious yes-man who would not dare to utter a peep of protest against policies pursued by a monolithic regime for which the 'bureaucratic politics' model seems inappropriate.

Participants:

Michael Jabara Carley obtained his Ph.D. in history from Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario. He is professor of history at the *Université de Montréal*. He has published widely on Soviet relations with the West. Among these [publications](#) are *1939: The Alliance that Never Was and the Coming of World War II* (Chicago, 1999), also in French, Russian, Italian editions, H-Diplo forum, 2000. Significant essays include "'Only the USSR has... Clean Hands': the Soviet Perspective on the Failure of Collective Security and the Collapse of Czechoslovakia, 1934-1938," part 1, *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, vol. 21, no. 2 (June 2010), pp. 202-225; part 2, vol. 21, n^o 3 (September 2010), pp. 368-96, published in Russian, *Novaia i noveishaia istoriia*, n^o 1 (2012), pp. 44-81; and "[Caught in a Cleft-Stick: Soviet Diplomacy and the Spanish Civil War](#)," Gaynor Johnson (ed.), *The International Context of the Spanish Civil War* (Cambridge, UK, 2009), pp. 151-180. Professor Carley is working on a new book dealing with Soviet relations with the West and formation of the Grand Alliance.

William R. Keylor received his BA degree from Stanford University and his MA and Ph.D. degrees from Columbia University. He is Professor of History and International Relations in the Frederick L. Pardee School of Global Studies at Boston University. He is the author of many articles and book chapters on French foreign policy during the interwar period and on international history in the twentieth century as well as a *World of Nations: The International Order since 1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2nd edition, 2008) and *The Twentieth-Century World and Beyond: An International History since 1900* (New York: Oxford University Press, 6th edition 2011). He has just begun a study of French President Charles de Gaulle's relations with the United States.

Alexei Filitov is a graduate of Moscow University (1960) and Chief Research Associate, Institute of World History, at the Russian Academy of Sciences, and a lecturer in Contemporary History of International Relations, at the Russian University for Humanities in Moscow. He has published monographs in Russian on *The Cold War: Debate in Western Historiography* (Nauka, Moscow, 1991); *German Question: From Division to Unification* (Mezhdunarodnye Otnoshenia, Moscow, 1993); *Germany in Soviet Foreign Policy Planning, 1941- 1990* (Nauka, Moscow, 2009) and various articles on the diplomatic history of the World War Two and of the Cold War. His current projects include the documentary edition "The Soviet Union and Two German States, 1949 -1955, and articles for Russian-German textbook (Россия –Германия. Двадцатый век. Вехи совместной истории. Под ред. Г. Альтрихтера, В. Ищенко, Х. Мёллера, А. Чубарьяна).

Jonathan Haslam is the author of *Russia's Cold War. From the October Revolution to the Fall of the Wall* (New Haven 2011). His next book *Near and Distant Neighbours 1917-1989. A New History of Soviet Intelligence* (New York) will appear in 2015. He is Professor of the History of International Relations at Cambridge University and a Fellow of the British Academy.

Richard Overy is Professor of History at the University of Exeter, UK. He is the author of more than 25 books, including *Russia's War* (1998) and *The Dictators: Hitler's Germany and Stalin's Russia* (2004), which was winner of the Wolfson prize for History in 2004. His latest book is *The Bombing War: Europe 1939-1945* (2013).

It was after some hesitation that I accepted the offer to write a review of Michael Carley's new monograph. After all, the period covered is out of the scope of my research interests, which have concentrated on international history after 1945. One reason for my positive decision on this score was the experience that I had shared with three other colleagues of mine, during the Russia's 'dark 90s', in processing and commenting on documents from the Politburo 'Special Files' bearing on European affairs – in my case for the years 1923 to 1925. The project was sponsored by the Feltrinelli Foundation, which, like some other foreign NGOs of the time, seemed to aim more at saving Russian scholars under the ugly conditions of wild capitalism than at stimulating them to the highest standards of research activities. The result of the project had been a documentary edition rather patchy in its composition and uneven in its analytical aspect- so, at least, that is what I thought of it, with excessive self-critical zeal, perhaps.¹ It was intriguing to know whether a foreign researcher would accomplish more – in broadening the documentary basis and presenting a more complete and coherent image of the interaction between the young Soviet power and the Western world. A short answer is- yes, Carley does

First of all, one is struck by how wide and efficiently the author integrated in his book the new evidence presented in the documentary editions published in Russia in the recent years (but also from the more distant past – including that mentioned above, which brought this reviewer a certain satisfaction and tempered a bit his self-criticism). It applies especially to the monograph's sections on Soviet-German, Soviet-American, and Soviet- Chinese relations, where the author's own archival findings serve as an appendage (not of minor value, to be sure) to the published sources. The inverse proportion is discernible in the text's parts dealing with Soviet-British and Soviet-French relations. The scarcity of the relevant documents in the published form made the author plough the virgin land on a larger scale in the Russian Foreign Ministry's and former Party's archives, and he did it in an exemplary way.

No less impressive are his findings in the western archives (British, French, and American). In the context of today's revelations on the activities of the U.S. National Security Agency, the information on the British *Government Code and Cypher School* in the period covered in the book is of special interest. In Carley's sarcastic words, this organization "developed the most extraordinary talent of breaking the diplomatic codes, which allowed it to read secret telegrams between, among other places, Washington, Paris, Rome, and Moscow and their embassies in London[...] The Foreign Office thereby obtained a great advantage in dealing with other states, reading their secret communications. It was like being able to read the other fellow's mind; friend or foe made no difference to British code breakers" (125). Judging, however, by the samples in Carley's book of intercepts relating to the notorious 'Zinoviev letter' affair, the advantage for whoever perused those, either as an intelligence

¹ Политбюро ЦК РКП(б) – ВКП(б) и Европа. Решения «особой папки. 1923-1939. Рудколлегия: Г. Адиебековидр. М. РОССПЭН, 2001 [PolitbureauTsKPKP(b)-VKP(b) and Europe. "Special File" Decisions. 1923 -1939. Ed. by G. Adibekov et al. Moscow, 2001].

official and/or politician in twenties, or as a historian in our time, would not be too great, indeed. I will expand on this subject later.

In conceptualizing Soviet foreign policies, Carley follows the line of argumentation charted earlier by authors like Jonathan Haslam and Geoffrey Roberts², both of whom, while differing sharply in their outlooks, share the common idea of a profound conflict between the 'doves' and 'hawks' in Moscow's political elite. In the monograph under review those species are represented by the symbolic figures of "Comrades Narkomindel'cheskii and Kominternovskii" - a linguistic novelty invented seemingly by a German ambassador in Moscow, Ulrich von Brockdorff-Rantzau (95, 225). The former, the Foreign Commissariat's top men and diplomats in field - Georgii Chicherin, Maxim Litvinov, Leonid Krasin, Nikolai Krestinskii, and Christian Rakovskii, among others, are characterized as 'pragmatists,' the proponents of *realpolitik* patterned in good part on the ideas of Niccolo Machiavelli, while the latter - persons like the Comintern's leaders Grigorii Zinoviev and Nikolai Bukharin, as well as Stalin's "civil war crony" Klimentii Voroshilov, obtain the tags of "orators," and "revolutionary ideologues" (272, 416). The disregard for the recommendations of the "pragmatists" resulted in "occasional fiascos" and created an atmosphere "of the chaos and confusion that sometimes reigned in Soviet foreign policy," as the author succinctly points out (419). In this context, Carley disagrees with both Steven Cohen ["Bukharin's principal biographer has sought to rehabilitate him, but not entirely successfully" (274)] and the late Adam Ulam [the latter's theses that "there was no contention in Soviet foreign policy making [...] and no independent-minded Soviet diplomats save Krasin" are flatly rejected by citing "indisputable proof to the contrary" (279)]. In both cases the author makes good points.

What may raise some doubts is Carley's treatment of Stalin's changing role in the formation of Soviet foreign policy. At first the reader will think of him as a notorious 'ideologue', an ardent opponent of the course for the normalization of relations with the West advocated by the 'pragmatists'. How else could one interpret the hitherto unknown story of a conflict which flared up in the heated air of a 'war scare' in early 1927, between the Party Secretary-General and Deputy Foreign Commissar Litvinov? (275-279). Carley demonstrates vividly how the latter dared to disprove practically all the official theses on the international situation, rejecting out of hand, in particular, the idea that "England is pushing Poland toward the war with us" and pointing out that the growing hostility to the USSR in both countries was stimulated by the Soviet Union's "own declarations and the conduct of our press" (275). The author also quotes at some length from Stalin's letter to the Politburo, "in which he attempted to demolish Litvinov's main points" (276). So far, so good. In a concluding chapter another image of the Kremlin ruler is presented, however: "As for Stalin, he appeared to learn from his mistakes - well, some of them...Litvinov gradually reasserted the prerogatives of the NKID, often writing to Stalin to bridle at

² See Jonathan Haslam, *Soviet foreign policy, 1930-1933* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1983), *The Soviet Union and the Struggle for Collective Security in Europe, 1933- 1939* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1984) and Geoffrey Roberts, "Litvinov's Lost Peace, 1941-1946," *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (2002), 23-54.

Comintern or OGPU excesses which needlessly provoked the West” (423). Many pertinent questions arise: how deep and how firm was Stalin’s ‘conversion,’ if any? What was his reaction to Litvinov’s protests and/or pleas? And how far do the ‘pragmatism’ and ‘realism’ of NKID luminaries themselves extend? At least one striking case of ideological aberration in Litvinov’s normally realist mind was mentioned in a recent piece of Russian historical writing.³ It is a pity that the author largely avoids – with some exceptions – to integrate it (unlike the Russian documentary editions) into his analysis.

The paradigm of *doves vs. hawks*, or *pragmatists vs. ideologues*, serves also as a fitting methodological tool for the author’s treatment of the Western dimension in the uneasy relationship of the young Soviet power with the outside world. The Russian reader will be much surprised, for instance, by evidence indicating that British Foreign Secretary Austen Chamberlain was not such an implacable anti-Soviet monster as he had been presented in Soviet propaganda and perceived by the masses (after all, a massive campaign of fundraising for the Red Air Force was conducted in the late twenties under the battle slogan ‘Our Answer to Chamberlain,’ and even the worst university student in Russia would mention this name as that of the most vicious enemy of the USSR – even though sometimes his half-brother Neville is meant or both are perceived as a single person). The real *hawks* in the British political class were a trio of ‘Die-Hards’ (Frederick Edwin Smith Birkenhead, Winston Churchill, William (Jix) Joynson-Hicks): “These Tories hated the USSR on principle, but were further incensed by the ruin of British interests in China. They thought they could intimidate the Bolsheviks and force them to submit to the British conditions. Chamberlain was not so sure, or at least preferred to pursue a more cautious, less confrontational policy. In this he faced opposition not only from the Die-Hards, but also from hard-line officials in the Foreign Office” (188). Even more surprising is to know that “a more cautious, less confrontational” approach of the Foreign Secretary was duly recognized by his Soviet partners: “In early 1927 in a meeting with the French Ambassador Jean Herbette, Litvinov said he disapproved of press attacks on Chamberlain in particular, for he was aware of Foreign Secretary’s ‘moderation’” (273). The instances of Chamberlain’s “moderation,” or “restraint” are well-documented, and they generally substantiate the author’s point.

Less convincing is Carley’s too broad generalization on the ‘hard-line’ position of Chamberlain’s subordinates. It seems that their attitudes were changeable, varying in tone and in substance from time to time, and even dependent on who recorded them. A telling example: the same Head of the Northern Department in the Foreign Office, John Gregory, who sent to a Soviet envoy a very undiplomatic note in conjunction with the apparently forged ‘Zinoviev letter’ and in so doing precipitated a major crisis in British-Soviet relations, tried, in a subsequent conversation with the same envoy, cited by Carley, to absolve himself of any responsibility for this action. Gregory “seemed rather bewildered by

³ И.А. Хормач. Возвращение в мировое сообщество: борьба и сотрудничество Советского государства с Лигой наций в 1919- 1934 гг. М.:Кучковополе, 2011, С. 269 [Irina A. Khormach. *A Return to a World Community: The Struggle and Cooperation of the Soviet State with the League of Nations, 1919-1933*. Moscow, Kuchkovo Pole, 2011, P. 269]. In March 1926 Litvinov came out with the preposterous idea of the setting-up “The Peoples’ League” as an alternative to the existing League of Nations.

the sudden crisis, implying that he was pushed aside in the affair and that he was obliged to answer to higher authority, meaning Crowe,” the author writes, adding an interesting nuance to this picture: “These were remarkably candid comments, though Gregory left no record of them in the Foreign Office files. It was not the first time that Gregory said one thing to his Soviet interlocutors and quite another to his Foreign Office colleagues” (124).

Unweaving the tangled web of evidence freshly collected (including the above-mentioned intercepts of French, Italian, Turkish, and, above all, of Soviet diplomatic mail, which, as stated before, did not bring out anything sensational), Carley confirms that ‘the chief culprit’ in ‘Zinoviev letter’ scandal was in fact not Gregory, but rather his direct superior, Permanent Undersecretary in the Foreign Office, Eyre Crowe.⁴ One is inclined to place Gregory into the cohort of the innocent victims of the intrigues by the ‘hawks’, but Carley wisely does not subscribe to this oversimplified version. Gregory is quoted, for instance, as once recommending to deal the Soviet Power “a decisive blow”: “there must be no ultimatum requiring a reply, but a general and summary ejection of Bolshevik agents, official, trade, or otherwise, from every country”- all of which sounds not quite ‘dovish.’ (190). On the other hand, citing a German source, the author shows that there were even more ‘hawkish’ officials in the Foreign Office—persons like Crowe’s successor, William Tyrrell: “Dufour [the German ambassador in London] believed that there was a split inside the Foreign Office between Tyrrell, who represented the Tory hard line, and Gregory, who represented the more flexible position of the Conservative ‘industrial group’ in the House of Commons and also of the Liberal and Labour parties” (218). In another place both Tyrrell and Gregory are depicted – with reference to an opinion of Soviet *chargé d’affaires* Arkadii P. Rozengol’ts – as working together “behind Chamberlain’s back” in order to “break out of the Foreign Secretary’s more cautious approach to Moscow” (268). Whose picture was closer to the reality? The author should not be reproached for not giving a definite answer. The main thing for him is that there were differences in political preferences, and their very existence opened the ‘windows of opportunity’ for a more stable and more harmonious (or less non-harmonious) relationship. The reviewer concurs.

Similar ‘windows’ existed in the interaction between Soviet Russia and Weimar Germany (with the opportunity realized in the 1922 Rapallo Treaty), in Soviet-French relations (on a lesser scale and with no tangible results), and much, much less, if any, in those between the Soviet state and the United States—so Carley’s argument runs. In the latter case the blame should be laid, in his opinion, squarely at the American side; the Soviets erred rather in their too-benign perception of the American ‘evil empire’. Carley does not use this catchword, to be sure, but he is outspoken enough: Foreign Commissar Chicherin was “naïve” in “believing the United States to be a more democratic society than France or England. [...] American capitalism was just as tightfisted and ruthless as, and perhaps more so than, its European varieties, for there was no strong socialist party in the United States

⁴ This point was first elaborated in a research paper by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office’s Chief Historian. See Gil Bennett, “‘A most extraordinary and mysterious business’: The Zinoviev Letter of 1924,” London, 1999. For my review of her book see *Новая и новейшая история*. 2000, № 6, С. 197-199 (*Modern and Contemporary History*, 2000, No.6, 197-199).

to put a brake on a barely regulated capitalist elite” (33). The citations from President Woodrow Wilson and Secretary of State Robert Lansing seemed to corroborate those points, as well as the colorful episodes of failed attempts by the Soviet emissaries to reach accommodation with the American bankers and/ or politicians under the Harding, Coolidge and Hoover administrations: “An improvement in American-Soviet relations would have to wait until the election of Franklin D. Roosevelt as U.S. President” (381). Was it a more intense regulation of a ‘capitalist elite’, even in an absence of a ‘strong socialist party’, that caused this improvement and put a temporary end to this kind of an American ‘exceptionalism’? It is a moot question, and again Carley can hardly be faulted for not offering the overreaching explanation. If he continues his research into the thirties, some answers will be forthcoming, perhaps.

As for his present *magnum opus*, one may say that it prompts more questions than it answered, but this is not untypical for any in-depth work of research. One minor point, where this reviewer would take exception to Carley’s formulation, concerns the monograph’s subtitle: if one speaks of “Soviet-Western Relations,” the concentration on those with three European states (Britain, France, Germany) and the United States and the exclusion of others can hardly be conclusively explained. Among the ‘others,’ only Poland is mentioned briefly in the context of Soviet-German dialogue (244-246). With so many ‘New Europeans’ proclaiming nowadays their all-time inherent ‘Western’ identities, Carley may run the risk of causing their ire.

Another point of a rather linguistic nit-picking: the Russian verb *podlzhivat’sia* conveys the meaning of a soft submission to one’s will, of toeing one’s line, tuning in to one’s voice (the latter is closest to the original, since the root word is ‘lad’ i.e. ‘the tune’). While Chicherin expressed a negative attitude to the alleged submissiveness of Swedes or Danes, he still did not speak of them as “licking the butts of British ministers” (66). The vulgar rudeness was neither his hallmark nor that of Soviet diplomacy. It was a complex phenomenon – still with a distinct trend to de-ideologization, as Carley convincingly shows.

Review by Jonathan Haslam, Cambridge University

Michael Carley has produced a book rich in fascinating detail about lively personalities, an entire tapestry replete with diplomatic caricatures, highlighting those who executed one dimension of Soviet foreign policy after the revolution: the policy of peaceful co-existence, a term prematurely coined by the eccentric and highly strung Commissar for Foreign Affairs Georgii Chicherin in 1918.

I do like the book not least because it brings back fond memories of my own limited exploration of the period, but at the same time its optic seems somewhat askew.

Silent Conflict is to be welcomed in that before Carley only a handful of historians had ever worked in depth on the first decade of Soviet foreign policy. Compared to that of the mainstream European Powers, like fascist Italy or Weimar Germany in the 1920s, Moscow's foreign policy has been relatively neglected. And no one has ever gone into quite as much detail with so much evident relish on all aspects of Soviet diplomacy in the 1920s. The writing, invariably lucid, drives one along at an energetic pace. My problem as an uneasy back seat driver is exactly where we are going.

The important segments of the history Carley recounts have not in truth been quite as 'hidden' as he claims. The result is thus in the end a little disappointing. Was it not journalist and agent of the OGPU Louis Fischer who as early as 1930 published two books based on exclusive access to Soviet archives courtesy of Commissar for Foreign Affairs Georgii Chicherin? And are we entirely to dismiss the work of Gabriel Gorodetsky, Stephen White, Daniel Calhoun, and Isaac Deutscher, let alone E.H. Carr?¹

In *Silent Conflict* we do get to peer much further inside the tent: at the Commissariat of Foreign Affairs we find the beds unmade and everyone in various stages of undress. We can listen in on the bickering. But we have known about the rivalry between Chicherin and his deputy Maxim Litvinov for over half a century. And I covered in *The Soviet Union and the Threat from the East 1933-41*,² the Lev Karakhan-Litvinov rivalry more than a decade ago in a work not cited by Carley. Having got that off my chest, apart from the nuances of diplomatic tactics, how much did all this ultimately matter?

¹ Above all, E. Carr, *Interregnum, 1923-24* (London and New York 1954) and *Socialism in One Country, 1924-26* (London and New York 1964); I. Deutscher, *The Prophet Unarmed: Trotsky, 1921-1929* (London 1959); D. Calhoun, *The United Front: The TUC and the Russians, 1923-1928* (Cambridge 1976); S. White, *The Origins of Détente: The Genoa Conference and Soviet-Western Relations, 1921-22* (Cambridge 1985); G. Gorodetsky, *The Precarious Truce: Anglo-Soviet Relations, 1924-1927* (Cambridge 1977); L. Fischer, *The Soviets in World Affairs*, Vols 1 and 2 (London 1930).

² *The Soviet Union and the Threat from the East 1933-41* (London 1992),

Eight decades apart, Fischer and Carley (like Richard Debo before him³) both begin by homing in on diplomacy, with Soviet Russia on the back foot, holding its own against an aggressive outer world, presumably innocent until unaccountably attacked by the British. Carley insists that George Kennan - surely the most perceptive observer of Soviet Russia under Stalin - was wrong in insisting that whereas Soviet Russia was hated for what it did, the West was hated for what it was.

Yet Carley's own perspective is distorted. It is not so much what is there but what is missing and how the other side is represented or misrepresented. Soviet foreign policy always encompassed far more than what he dishes up. Diplomacy was the secondary policy, the back-up when the main policy failed. Other areas of operations were not so pleasant, either. The fourth directorate of the army staff ran an aggressive line of terrorist activities - so-called 'active intelligence' - across the Polish border until stopped at chief of OGPU Feliks Dzerzhinsky's instigation just before he died of a massive coronary in 1926. Surely that mattered more to the Polish Government than sonorous words from the Narkomindel?

Through to the inauguration of the first Five Year Plan and the fateful decision on the forced collectivisation of agriculture in 1929, the expectation of foreign revolution without the action of the Red Army was sustained. Hitherto it was the only hope, however slender. The main policy was, after all, to spread the revolution; though you would not think that from reading Carley's book. We speed on past the disastrous march on Warsaw without fully taking into account the fact that it was almost universally viewed - uniquely with the exception of Karl Radek - in Moscow as a re-run of the Napoleonic wars (1920). The "März Aktion" (1921) in Germany is dismissed rather over hastily, and only the abortive Hamburg uprising (1923) is pored over, but for its statist - Francophobe - rather than revolutionary implications. The Bulgarian insurrection (1923) is ignored, as is the Estonian revolt (1924).

For this was not just a Russian revolution. Spreading it was seen as vital and as inevitably precipitating conflict with the West. This was no tea party. The Bolsheviks meant business. Having seized power against the odds and having set his sights on a global transformation, Lenin cynically separated out the institutional responsibilities for world revolution and diplomacy proper as a tactical adjustment to prevailing realities. The division of roles began purely for the purpose of plausible deniability on the part of the Soviet régime for Comintern subversion of governments with whom the Bolsheviks had diplomatic relations.

When Powers like Britain complained, Lenin said it showed where the shoe pinched. It was a polite fiction enabling governments seeking the easier path, for whatever reason - such as Weimar Germany, short of allies - to turn a blind eye to Communist subversion. But why are the stalwart opponents of this in the West like Winston Churchill, Lord Curzon, Lord Birkenhead and William Joynson-Hicks parodied as men who get everything out of proportion? Why is it assumed Comintern activities were no real threat? And why should

³ R. Debo, *Revolution and Survival: The Foreign Policy of Soviet Russia, 1917-1918* (Toronto 1979) and *Survival and Consolidation: The Foreign Policy of Soviet Russia, 1918-1921* (Montreal, 1992).

they not have reacted to it with ferocity?

The revolution in China did, after all, eventually succeed due to the creation of the Chinese Communist Party by Comintern. Party Secretary Mao Tse-tung continued to take orders up to 1949 and beyond. He finally broke with Moscow only in 1962. China until 1925 was Britain's second largest trading partner and the second largest recipient of British investment after India. And in Europe the rise of fascism was not unconnected with the threat Bolshevism was taken to represent, particularly in Italy (1920-1922) but also, crucially, in Spain (1936). And in Germany the Communist bogey was a very real concern to those of property who turned to Adolf Hitler for protection.

Soviet historians with access to the diplomatic archive alone in their turn mirrored Lenin's artful distinction between Communist revolutionism and diplomacy. This had continued well after the demise of Comintern with the bifurcation of foreign policy between the Central Committee International Department and the Foreign Ministry. And one cannot write about Soviet diplomacy in the 1970s, for example, without fully accounting in detail for the revolutionary dimension.

The tendency was for those historians in the West sympathetic to the Soviet Union to follow Russian counterparts in their habitual myopia: to focus on diplomacy, the relatively benign, defensive side of things, rather than the more inflammatory attempts, the offensive to spread world revolution. And even here these historians prefer to ignore the more sinister underground activities of secret intelligence special operations – the assassination in Paris of counter-revolutionary leader General Kutypov (1930), for example, or military collaboration, building poison gas factories, with the Reichswehr (1922-1933.)

This is a major defect, the misplaced side effect of empathy for Soviet Russia, the impact of which E.H. Carr himself managed to overcome despite his own empathy for the revolution since he also revelled in realism. Indeed, it gave him a perverse and peculiar satisfaction to pinpoint at any particular stage and to emphasise the ultimate unity of purpose between the diplomatists and the revolutionists.⁴ It was Carr who dug out the *Manchester Guardian* revelations about Soviet-German collaboration.

Carley claims (xiii) that Carr rejected a “bureaucratic politics” model (which did not then exist) “out of hand.” This is what Carr wrote:

Differences of opinion occurred within the party or within the Soviet machine, and sometimes led to the pursuit of apparently conflicting policies...It was long before the administrative machine became efficient or powerful enough to impose anything like uniformity throughout its vast domain. But no question arose or could arise between ‘party’ and ‘government’, or between ‘hot-headed’ party leaders and ‘cautious’ officials of Narkomindel... To assume that Narkomindel had a policy of its

⁴ See Haslam, *The Vices of Integrity: E.H. Carr, 1892-1982* (London, 1999)

own or could exercise influence in its own right was even wider of the mark; the policies which both Narkomindel and Comintern carried out were ultimately decided in the Politburo of the

Russian party (Carr, *Socialism in One Country*, Vol. 3, 17-18)

Yet the target of Carr's attack is the caricature of the crude distinction drawn between Narkomindel and Comintern - departmental patriotism, as the Russians would call it - as though each had formed its own institutional policy stance, between 'hot-heads' and 'moderates', and the assumption that Stalin was actually more moderate (the latter viewpoint Carley himself contests without acknowledgement of Carr's original insight.)

Carr allows for differences of view between people but not for a monolithic view of one institution versus a monolithic view of another. As we know, no one can claim Narkomindel held a united view, not least because Maxim Litvinov and Georgii Chicherin rarely agreed on anything. And that was the way Stalin liked it, the way he stacked the cards. It always suited him best. All sources of potential power had to be houses divided, except of course his own.

It is, moreover, incorrect that the history of Soviet foreign policy was impossible to write from Russian archival documents until the fall of the Soviet Union. Not only is diplomacy by nature bilateral in nature and the archives of the other side long been open (Carr used the *Ausamt* documents extensively), but the most notable Soviet documentary series, *Dokumenty vneshnei politiki SSSR*, continued to be published through the worst of the Brezhnev years. It was heavily edited but contained gems none the less, even on Soviet trade representative David Kandelaki's openings to the Nazis in 1935 and 1937 if one looked carefully enough.

Now, of course, research is a good deal easier. We face a plethora of documentary publications, which Carley has exploited. It has become ever more pointless to sit in the reading room of the Foreign Ministry Archive - which, by the way, \$200,000 of American and Japanese charitable donations brought into being courtesy of the Archive's international advisory committee - without any finding aids and at the mercy of the archivists' whimsy. The publication of documents from the Party archives is plentiful on the major issues, even secret intelligence. Carley unaccountably ignores this important dimension. Moreover his research assistants have barely dipped into Comintern material. Why?

The core question that arises from a work focusing so much on diplomats at the Commissariat of Foreign Affairs is how much their work actually mattered. Why work on them rather than policy overall? Chicherin and Litvinov were impotent most of the time, as Chicherin's now published testament - cited at length but only in Carley's conclusions - points out. The diplomats could propose, they could fight among themselves, criticise others in sister institutions, but they could not decide questions of policy. The Commissar or his deputy could attend Politburo on Thursdays when called in for advice. That was all. Crucially, they never had anything like the power of the British Foreign Office with a very

important seat in the Cabinet (second or third only to the Prime Minister himself.)

Focusing on a bureaucratic politics model also seems to me unwise. Even with respect to the Western Powers, diplomatic activity is merely the tip of the iceberg. Alone it is unlikely to explain what generated and sustained foreign policy given the importance of domestic politics and the economy, as the rise of Hitler so dramatically demonstrated. In the Soviet Union, of course, there existed no public opinion as such but Party opinion; and one could see even into the 1930s how Party opinion tried to scupper collective security and prompted Stalin to hold back from committing to French defence policy. Party opinion represented an insuperable obstacle to those like Litvinov, who sought and failed to elevate *raison d'état* above *raison de la révolution*. The collapse of collective security testified to that.

The most interesting episode that Carley explores in chapter 6 (plus the sequel in chapter 9), and he does this well, tends to confirm - against his overall thesis - that attending to diplomatic activity at the expense of the rest of policy distracts from the main business at hand. This is the story of Soviet China policy. Mocked by Trotsky, the revolution in China was Stalin and Bukharin's great Red hope after the disastrous failures of the German revolution in March 1921 and November 1923. The Chinese revolution, of course, broke out a mere eighteen months after Stalin's enthusiasm about moving the centre of the revolution from Moscow to Berlin.

But because Carley does not follow the history of Comintern from its inception in 1919 the reader has little idea of the significance of the Chinese revolution as the substitute for revolution in Europe in saving Russia from its isolation. The book is thus a fascinating excursion through the by-ways of Soviet diplomacy in the 1920s but leaves the reader clueless as to the direction taken by the motorway a few miles distant.

The central message of Michael Carley's scrupulously researched and carefully argued study of Soviet foreign policy between the Bolshevik Revolution and the end of the 1920s is that most historians of the Soviet Union have got it wrong. They have either exaggerated the extent to which foreign policy was hostage to a monolithic 'ideology' or used the history to discredit the young Soviet state as an inherently dishonest and incompetent example of totalitarianism, a state with which the West could not do business on conventional terms. Joseph Stalin's turn to Adolf Hitler in August 1939 was, Carley argues, exactly what Western commentators expected from a dictatorship no better than Hitler's.

This is a challenging statement, and one that is not entirely justified given the wealth of new books on the post-revolutionary decade that have appeared in the past decade or so. Using Adam Ulam or George Kennan as markers for the misapprehension of the course of Soviet foreign policy is to set up straw men. This straw has long been scattered. Nevertheless, Carley has identified important strands in understanding the foreign policy of the period that have not been set out so clearly before, nor based on such a wealth of archive material, (especially Soviet documents) to chart the often fractious, uncertain, and dissonant course of Soviet relations with the outside world.

The title *Silent Conflict* is, as Carley admits, rather misleading, since the conflict between the Soviet Communist Party and the chorus of anti-Bolshevik forces abroad was anything but silent. The term was coined by Soviet Foreign Affairs Commissar Maksim Litvinov to describe Soviet-American relations, and it is true that beneath the surface of the formal diplomatic courtesies there existed a more covert world of contacts, spying, propaganda, and intelligence that anticipated the classic Cold War by more than twenty years. But Carley uses the term ironically, because a major theme of the book is the extent to which in the Soviet Union itself a conflict went on across the whole of the 1920s between different elements of the new Soviet state and the Party, often concealed from outside scrutiny, about the proper conduct of foreign policy. There was, Carley insists, nothing monolithic about the system when it came to relations with the outside world, but instead a constant tension existed between the noisy mouthing of ideological mantras and the search for a more realistic and pragmatic set of policies. Like the history of German foreign policy under Hitler, the primacy of internal political pressures vied with the primacy of strategic interests abroad. The key difficulty for Western historians of the period has been to piece together a narrative that has essentially two distinct trajectories.

Carley has certainly succeeded in unravelling this muddled historical legacy by showing the ways in which domestic party politics (in only one party) interacted with, or often undermined, the conduct of external affairs. One important point to emerge from *Silent Conflict* is the simple fact that the People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs was not a permanent member of the Politburo, the party cabinet where all the key policies were discussed and the key decisions taken. Where in the British or American system, the Foreign Secretary or the Secretary of State are the most important figures in national

policy-making, foreign policy in the Soviet state never assumed the same position and its key practitioners, Georgii Chicherin and Maksim Litvinov, were permanently frustrated by the fact that leading Bolshevik politicians often thought they could conduct foreign policy too.

Carley has found a fascinating account in the archives penned by Chicherin when he was finally faced with the prospect of compulsory redundancy, which spells out all the problems his successor was likely to face when suggesting or implementing foreign policy. He highlighted three 'internal enemies' who constantly challenged or undermined the Commissariat's role: first was the GPU, the arrogant security apparatus that time and again acted as it saw fit to secure the revolutionary legacy (with a good deal of exaggerated fantasy about internal enemies typical of all security systems); second, the People's Commissariat for External Trade, which Chicherin blamed for messing up efforts to create a more benign impression with foreign traders and their governments; third, Comintern, set up in 1919 to export the revolution and, when that failed, to sustain a network of communist activities worldwide that acted as a perpetual menace not only to the host countries, but to the efforts of the People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs (NKID) to establish relatively normal foreign relations.

The narrative Carley has constructed engages with all these 'internal enemies' to show that Soviet foreign policy was essentially devised and conducted in a competitive 'polycratic' structure in which the messes caused by security agents, or foreign trade officials, or Comintern activists had to be cleared up (if they could be) by the patient work of those whose actual job it was to organize foreign relations. This is an important corrective to any view of the Soviet state as monolithic in power political terms or of Soviet policy as hostage to an ideological straitjacket. Carley underscores the well-known shift in the early Leninist state to a policy of pragmatism in the interests of sheer survival (a necessity made material in the staggering defeat of the Red Army by a poorly-resourced and desperate Polish Army in 1920). He also makes the important, if perhaps self-evident, claim that the real power-seekers in the Soviet system, Leon Trotsky as much as Stalin, were anything but ideological purists themselves, constantly shifting ground in a game of doctrinal polemics that would not have been out of place in the theological disputes of the early modern age. Stalin owed his success in the end to his ability to blend his revolutionary commitment with his unscrupulous understanding of political behavior; Machiavelli as much as Marx, as Carley puts it.

The most important area of foreign policy conflict lay in Soviet relations with China, though Western historians have all too often been absorbed by the issues raised by the Soviet-German axis or the adolescent Cold War with the West. The conflict mattered not only because of the issues at stake in the Chinese area once the old imperial system fell apart, but because Soviet activity in China became a litmus test of relations between the major contestants in the Party power struggles. Carley makes much of the decision by the Politburo to set up a China Commission to oversee policy there, and Stalin played a more central role in these foreign policy calculations than he did in other areas. It was here that Chicherin found the NKID more or less marginalized as Comintern interfered to stoke up anti-imperialist sentiment in China and to encourage nationalist revolution, and Stalin and

Trotsky vied with each other in trying to double-guess the development of Chinese politics. It is well-known that between them the Soviet interlopers quite misjudged Chinese Nationalist leader Chiang Kai-shek and ended up with tens of thousands of dead Chinese communists, the overt hostility of the Western imperial powers, and a residue of distrust between the two sides that never quite evaporated over the decade or so that followed.

The great paradox of the Soviet position lay in the role of Comintern in particular, led successively by two Stalin rivals, first Grigorii Zinoviev, followed by Nikolai Bukharin. Comintern's public role was to spread the Communist message, to encourage revolutionary movements and disseminate propaganda to undermine or challenge the bourgeois world, but the Soviet Union throughout the 1920s depended on that same bourgeois world to supply the industrial equipment and know-how necessary to turn Russia from a predominantly peasant state into an industrial giant. The two strategies were hard to reconcile, and much of Carley's account focuses on the efforts of the NKID officials and diplomats to explain to their foreign counterparts that Comintern was a noisy necessity for political reasons, while the real business of buying and selling should go on regardless. This was, Carley argues, not simply Soviet chicanery, since both sides had to swallow their ideological distaste for the other in order to make money. It is interesting to note here that in the late 1930s this was exactly what happened in Soviet-German relations. While both sides, in Stalin's words, poured 'buckets of shit' over each other, the political re-alignment was undertaken as a by-product of potential trade agreements.

Carley argues throughout *Silent Conflict* that the Soviet state was always concerned with its own interests, whether simple survival or the industrial expansion of the late 1920s, and if this meant making concessions or talking with capitalists, this was a product of straightforward expediency. He nevertheless plays down too much the role of ideology by emphasizing the confusion, flexibility, and Machiavellianism of the regime. If the old-fashioned Cold-War view of the Soviet Union now no longer matches the historical reality, the baby should not be thrown out with the proverbial bath water. This was a revolutionary state, and Western anxieties about the prospect of Communist subversion were not all fantasies. Even Stalin, the most shrewd and unprincipled of political operators, wanted Soviet survival not just for its own sake, or even, it might be argued, for the sake of his personal power, but because he wanted to see eventually a socialist world and the destruction of the old order of empires and bourgeois economics. Why, in the end, go to such lengths to build up Soviet power and modernize Russian society? Why bother to construct a totalizing culture? The judgment of Stalin in this context, as in others, has too often in recent historiography¹ assumed that he was a dictator first and foremost and a Marxist only a distant second.

¹ See for example Dmitri Volkogonov, *Stalin: Triumph and Tragedy*, London, 1991; Simon Montefiore, *Stalin. The Court of the Red Tsar*, London, 2003; Vladimir Tismaneanu, *The Devil in History: Communism, Fascism and Some Lessons for the Twentieth Century*, Los Angeles, 2012; Robert Gellately, *Lenin, Stalin, and Hitler*, London, 2007.

Carley has done all historians of the early Soviet system a great service by disentangling the troubled course of foreign policy in the 1920s and exposing almost all of what the Soviet archive can say about it. This will be the major reference point for understanding not only Soviet relations with the wider world, but the functional relationship between foreign policy and domestic political rivalries. If Carley overstates the extent to which historians date the Cold War from the crisis years at the end of World War II, he has filled out the story of how that confrontation played out in the decade that followed Allied intervention. The 1930s, he says, is another story, but the reverberations of the political culture that developed in the 1920s for the conduct of relations between the Soviet Union and the other powers are evident right through to Operation Barbarossa and the German invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941.

Author's Response by Michael Jabara Carley, Université de Montréal

Any scholarly debate about Soviet foreign policy, either before or after World War II, inevitably comes to focus on motivation and personality. Was policy driven by ideology, by realism and pragmatism, or by some combination of both? Was the Soviet leader I. V. Stalin the sole arbiter of foreign policy, or was there a “polycratic” organisation of power in the Soviet state, as suggested by Richard Overy? Basically, how does one reconcile the exercise of power with the influence of ideology, as historians sometimes ask?

I have long been interested in this question, and in *Silent Conflict* I try to sort out an answer, insofar as evidence permits. My book is not a hastily written pop essay of ‘culturalist’ opinion, but rather a work based on multinational archival research. Nor at the outset was the conception of this study mine alone. It was originally a joint project with Richard K. Debo, a long-time friend and colleague, who wrote two books on Soviet foreign policy between 1917 and 1921. Our idea was to write a book on Soviet relations with the major western powers—Germany, France, Britain, and the United States—during the 1920s. It was an ambitious project, and it would take time to accomplish. In the 1990s we obtained financial support from Social Sciences and Research Council of Canada: I set out on trips to France, Britain, the United States, and the Russian Federation. Richard went off to Germany and to Britain.

Between the two of us, we did a lot of research, and the present book ought to have been co-authored. But even the best laid plans sometimes go awry. Richard became gravely ill and fell out of the partnership. At the time I was working on the 1930s, and so the notes we had gathered, the photocopies, books, and papers went into boxes, stored away for future use.

In 2010, I pulled them out to write a single chapter on the 1920s as an introduction to a study on the formation of the anti-Nazi Grand Alliance. I wrote one chapter, then another and another, and realised that I had so much material that I should take up the original project of a book on the 1920s.

This ambition was facilitated by the publication in Moscow of a number of important document collections, as Aleksei Filitov notes, on Soviet relations with the United States and Germany and on Soviet involvement in the Chinese revolution. *Silent Conflict* is also based on research in the AVPRF, the foreign ministry archives, and to a lesser degree RGASPI, the Communist Party archives. As those who have been there know, it has not been easy to work in the AVPRF. One needed the tenacity of Sisyphus and the patience of a saint. Researchers still do not have access to inventories; they must explain to archivists what they want to see and hope for the best. Like shooting dice, sometimes one wins; other times it’s snake eyes. After 2000, the odds turned against the player. I wrote to the AVPRF in 2006 for further access, and received what amounted to a *fin de non-recevoir*. Still, if one wants the excitement and pleasure of new discoveries, Moscow is where to find them. It is a risky endeavour, but the Soviet archives are rather like the proverbial onion: one peels away one layer to find another and another...

Speaking of the sources, Jonathan Haslam makes much of the *Dokumenty vneshnei politiki SSSR (DVP)*. This was first big series on Soviet diplomacy published in Moscow, and started at the end of the 1950s. It went up to 21 volumes (to 1938) before the collapse and dismemberment of the Soviet Union. Other volumes in the series have since been published, though none recently. The volumes for 1939–1941 are of considerable value. When there was nothing else, one went to these volumes. I have often cited them in previous work, though they are thin for the 1920s. The *DVP* is hit or miss, often superficial. The editors aimed to show that the Soviet side desired a rapprochement with the West and that the West did not reciprocate. They abhorred highlighting disagreements inside the Soviet government or publishing comments of a too negative personal nature. How discreet they were! The unpublished Soviet archives and the post-1990 published collections are of another order of quality altogether. Of course, as Haslam notes, the archives of “the other side” have been open for a long time. I make the point in *Silent Conflict*, as I do elsewhere, that you cannot properly study Soviet foreign policy solely from diplomatic papers of “the other side,” written by people who hated the Soviet Union. Try comparing the Soviet and Western records of meetings, as I do, and you will see what I mean.

Silent Conflict is based on deep multi-archival research. But it is also a narrative history, written for a wider audience than the small group of experts in the field. If someone is looking for that special language of the ‘new’ cultural history, you will not find it in my book, anywhere. Nor do I much engage other specialists, though I set out a few parameters at the start. I recognise the work of other scholars, including Haslam, for no historian works in a vacuum, and I dedicate my book to Richard Debo’s accomplishments as a scholar. Nevertheless, historiographical debate is not my objective, I write to engage my readers and to introduce them to a heretofore largely untold story. It’s an inside look, permitted by the availability of newly published and unpublished Soviet papers.

Overy says that I have oversimplified Western preconceptions of the Soviet Union by citing George Kennan and Adam Ulam. These are old views, strawmen, he says, and the straw has been scattered. By some historians certainly, myself included, but an ‘Orientalist,’ Russophobic consensus remains prevalent about the Soviet Union and indeed about contemporary Russia. The same is true of the entrenched idea that the Cold War is a post-1945 phenomenon.

These issues are rather like the Treaty of Versailles. You remember, Versailles was ‘unfair’ to Germany, ‘too harsh,’ and thus a major cause of World War II. A generation of historians, Stephen Schuker, Walter MacDougall, Marc Trachtenberg, Sally Marks, among others, has gone to great lengths to debunk this old canard. But it still holds on to life like a zombie who should have died long ago. So it is with the post-World War II Cold War; another zombie who refuses to die.

What about the thorny questions of ideology and pragmatism and what about Soviet domestic politics? Who finally was running the show in Moscow: Comrade Narkomindel’cheskii or Comrade Kominternovskii? Haslam is sure it is Comrade Kominternovskii. Overy thinks Kominternovskii may have had a bit more sway than I give

him credit for. Filitov appears to think I flip flop, unsure of the answer. *Hélas*, Comrade Narkomindel'cheskii 'can't get no respect' from my commentators.

Overy points out that the Bolsheviks were socialist revolutionaries and internationalists. They fervently believed in world revolution and in solidarity with the working classes of other countries. Why should they not do so? The Bolsheviks hated colonialism and imperialism, and the racism that went with it. They wanted to offer a helping hand where they could, even if they did not always practice what they preached, as Commissar for Foreign Affairs G. V. Chicherin sometimes pointed out. They faced adversaries in the West who reciprocated in equal measure their hatred, who did everything they could to throttle and kill the infant Soviet state in its cradle. The conflict, or "silent conflict", as Deputy Commissar for Foreign Affairs M. M. Litvinov called it, was tit for tat. In 1919 the Bolsheviks set up the Comintern to take revolution to the West, but it was, as Soviet diplomats sometimes insisted, primarily a weapon of self-defence against the West's foreign military intervention. The Red Army was not strong enough to launch a counter-offensive into the heart of Europe; it could only strike back through the use of propaganda. For a time in 1918–1920 this propaganda was dangerous; it served as a weapon of war against the capitalist West.

So yes, the Bolsheviks were genuine revolutionaries who believed in their cause. Commissar Chicherin and his deputy Litvinov often tried to explain these matters to Western interlocutors. Of course, we were and will remain revolutionaries, they said, but we have some common interests, notably in trade, with you in the West. We need the business, and so do you. Accept us as we are, as we must accept you as you are. Except in Germany, these proposals made little headway. The West was no less hostile to the Soviet Union, and no less willing to do harm to Moscow when opportunities arose. It had its own ideologues as fervent as those in the USSR. In fact, it was audacious of the West to object to Soviet propaganda and interference in its domestic affairs when the so-called Entente had tried for more than three years to overthrow Soviet power. Talk about Pot calling Kettle black. The Allies were like house breakers, Litvinov maintained, they smashed all the furniture and crockery and left us "as beggars." Then, they wanted *us* to pay for damages (104-05).

After the failure of military intervention (1917–1921), a stalemate developed between Soviet Russia and the West. Neither side was reconciled to the other; the West tried to impose economic sanctions, denied credit, and sought to force the Soviet government to renounce socialism, to pay the repudiated tsar's debts, and to compensate bankers and industrialists for property nationalised during the revolution. The Comintern remained: it provided reinsurance against a revival of western military intervention, and as Litvinov and Chicherin often pointed out, it was impossible, for political reasons, to abolish it. Abolition would mean in effect renouncing solidarity with revolutionaries abroad. That was unthinkable. How presumptuous: 'the Entente' thought Soviet Russia should renounce its principles and become like the 'civilised' West.

As Litvinov emphasised, the Comintern figured in Soviet domestic politics. It was headed by G. E. Zinoviev, then N. I. Bukharin, both allies and later beaten rivals of Stalin. They sat in the Politburo, the Soviet Cabinet in effect, unlike Chicherin and Litvinov, who were not members,

but only sometime invited guests. This anomalous situation offered many opportunities for trouble or *bardak*, as Russians might say. Zinoviev and Bukharin represented a Comintern constituency, Comrade Kominternovskii. They brought his interests to the Politburo, and they defended an ‘eastern’ as opposed to a ‘western’ foreign policy strategy. Litvinov reported on the conflict between advocates of the two strategies, the western being focused on improving relations with Germany and Britain or France, the eastern intended to support anti-imperialist movements such as that in China. There was even some support for this latter strategy in the eastern bureau of the Commissariat for Foreign Affairs (the Narkomindel or NKID). Chicherin too had an interest in China, seeing the development of the anti-imperialist movement there as a way of improving security on Soviet far eastern frontiers. For Chicherin, revolutionary sentiment intermingled with national security interests, as indeed they did in Turkey, Persia, and Afghanistan.

Hence, to say, as Overy does, that the “Comintern interfered” in Soviet China policy does not quite describe the circumstances as I see them. The Politburo was where policy was determined. Zinoviev and Bukharin were Politburo members and represented the interests of their constituency, being temporary allies of Stalin. For as long as he needed them, Stalin might give ground when, for example, they wished to meddle, say, in Germany or especially in China. It was not the Comintern that so much “interfered” in policy making, as it was a platform for Soviet politicians, “power seekers,” in Overy’s words, who in the Politburo, meddled in Soviet foreign policy-making, exploiting the absence of the NKID. Of course, personal sentiment, emotion, and revolutionary beliefs also influenced decision-making, but the Comintern, “enemy no. 1” as Chicherin facetiously called it, was a power base and an *instrument* of Politburo policy. Here at work was the “competitive polycratic structure” to which Overy refers.

The NKID acted more or less like a conventional ministry of foreign affairs, defining national interests and seeking to protect them. As readers will observe in *Silent Conflict*, the NKID really did run Soviet foreign policy, in most parts of the world, most of the time. Litvinov and Chicherin thought this only normal. Foreign policy should be developed in the NKID and brought to the Politburo for approval. They regarded Zinoviev and Bukharin, among others, as presumptuous, irritating, disruptive interlopers. Litvinov called them “orators”, who talked or wrote too freely, needlessly alienating the Western Powers with whom the NKID had to deal. Litvinov complained that Bukharin was incorrigible. “We write, we protest, Bukharin repents,” wrote Litvinov in 1927, “nonetheless tomorrow... he will do the same thing” (274). He was a hopeless re-offender. Litvinov did not like playing the role of concierge with broom and dustbin in hand, cleaning up messes left behind by Zinoviev and Bukharin.

So Chicherin and Litvinov felt frustrated. It’s a dirty job, Chicherin noted, ‘behind the scenes.’¹ Litvinov compared work in the NKID to Sisyphus pushing his rock up the mountain. They never gave up though; they never abandoned their rock. It is true by the

¹ Chicherin to I. M. Maiskii (Tokyo), personal, 19 July 1928, Ivan Mikhailovich Maiskii, *Izbrannaia perepiska s Rossiiskimi korrespondentami*, 2 vols. (Moscow, 2005), I, p. 311.

way that Chicherin and Litvinov often differed, rather like sibling rivals, but as Chicherin once admitted, their differences were centered mostly around tactics (134). On the big issues, contrary to what Haslam suggests, they saw eye to eye.

Please don't send me reports about the usual 'inevitable ruin of capitalism,' Litvinov wrote in 1925 to I. M. Maiskii, then counsellor at the Soviet embassy in London, seeking information on the British economy. I can get those out of our press. 'We need absolutely objective material.' Maiskii agreed and reassured Litvinov.² He later wrote to Zinoviev that he was being careful in London, consistent with his 'Narkomindel'skii service.' 'I work for the Narkomindel'skii line,' he went on, 'I am absolutely not authorised by the Comintern to do its business.'³ Nevertheless, Maiskii failed to copy his letter to Litvinov or Chicherin. The oversight was of no consequence; Stalin had already lowered the boom on Zinoviev. He was on his way out of power.

There were thus definite tensions in Soviet foreign policy-making. But was diplomacy "the secondary policy," as Haslam insists, "the back-up when the main policy failed"? Here Haslam puts his finger on the central point at issue between us. There was no monolithic 'Marxist-Leninist' line that straitjacketed Soviet policy, I would reply, rendering traditional Russian national interests of secondary importance. In fact, the secret language of the NKID bore no resemblance to the public language of the Soviet state. "Language on stage," I say, "was different from language backstage" (420). Overy asks why Stalin would want to build up Soviet power if not for revolutionary purposes. Stalin himself provided the answer in a famous, oft-quoted speech in 1931. We are 50 to 100 years behind the West, Stalin declared; if we don't catch up in the next ten years, we will be beaten, crushed as Russia was beaten time after time in the past (352). In the light of World War II, and the German invasion almost exactly ten years later, this language catches the historian's eye.

In the foreign policy controversies in Moscow, Stalin of course played a crucial role. He too was a Bolshevik revolutionary, as Overy notes, and a skilled, unscrupulous politician. He was involved in Soviet foreign policy-making from 1922 onward. He openly criticised Chicherin, Litvinov, and other NKID diplomats during the 1920s on various issues, a number of which I highlight in *Silent Conflict*. In 1923 he rounded on Chicherin, who dared to remind Stalin of his own stated pragmatism (81–82). One of the most important clashes of the 1920s, if not the most important, took place in February 1927 when Litvinov, as Filitov observes, "dared to disprove practically all the official theses on the international situation." That took courage even in the 1920s.

Stalin was furious. Litvinov warned of a "catastrophe" in China, so also did Stalin's most formidable rival, L. D. Trotskii. You can see the problem. Was Litvinov a Trotskyist, backing the despised Nemesis? Definitely not, but Stalin, who disliked correspondence, penned a

² Litvinov to Maiskii, 17 Oct. 1925, and Maiskii to Litvinov, 4 Jan. 1926, Maiskii, *Izbrannaia perepiska*, I, pp. 266–67, 268–69.

³ Maiskii to Zinoviev, very secret, 10 April 1926, *ibid.*, pp. 274–76.

five-page rejoinder for the Politburo. It was a blustering, disingenuous polemic intended to demolish Litvinov. All members of the Politburo signed it. *Finis* Trotskii, but not Litvinov. Eight days later, the Politburo approved resolutions in conformity with Litvinov's recommendations (285). What was going on?

The same thing happened in 1929 at the time of negotiations for renewal of British diplomatic relations with Moscow that had ruptured in May 1927. Stalin went on a private rant to V. M. Molotov, his right-arm, about Litvinov and relations with Britain. Litvinov is "not interested" in the revolutionary side of Soviet policy. He's an "opportunist," said Stalin. And yet the Politburo approved Litvinov's British policy, which in the end proved successful. Anglo-Soviet relations were re-established in November 1929 (365–66, 370). The following year Stalin named Litvinov to succeed the ailing Chicherin as Commissar for Foreign Affairs.

What was going on? Stalin knew very well what kind of commissar he was getting. This sort of thing happened often during 1920s: Stalin blustered at Chicherin, Litvinov, or other NKID officials, but the Politburo, with some notable exceptions of course, approved their policies.

Even in China, the biggest exception, Stalin initially pursued the cautious line recommended by Chicherin. Stalin was skeptical of success and wanted to limit Soviet commitments there. "We have to be revolutionaries—this is without question," Stalin wrote in 1925, "but one cannot lose touch with the ground, acting like a fantasist, this is also true" (201). So what happened to make Stalin change his mind and succumb to *fantazerstvo*? Was it Trotskii, ready to pounce on a bungled Soviet policy in China, accusing Stalin of betraying the revolution? The Soviet ambassador in China, L. M. Karakhan, offered his own explanation. He agreed with Stalin about avoiding revolutionary "fantasies," but he warned "that... in China the ground is so hot [with revolution] that it is very easy to lose sight of reality" (262–63). As I note in a different context, "You could take the Bolsh out of the revolution, but not the revolution out of the Bolsh" (399). Overy would certainly concur. Domestic politics and sympathy for the revolution in China seem to have led to Soviet mission creep and to the "catastrophe" in April 1927 against which Litvinov had warned.

So how does one evaluate Stalin? Who was his *real* favourite, Comrade Kominternovskii or Comrade Narkomindel'cheskii? In the end I do not draw categorical conclusions, as Filitov noticed, though I don't flip flop. With the elimination of his rivals at the end of the 1920s, I comment that "Stalin appeared more disposed to support a coherent foreign policy, for the overt domestic political battles in which it was a stake were over" (423). Litvinov and Comrade Narkomindel'cheskii anyway got a little more 'respect' for the time-being, not least because, as Soviet diplomat Maiskii observed, Litvinov's 'personal authority' was increasing.⁴ This was a very good thing: Maiskii remarked to a friend that 'Russophobia and Sovietophobia' in the West tried the skills of Soviet diplomacy.⁵

⁴ Maiskii to Litvinov, personal, 9 June 1931; and Maiskii to Litvinov, 5 Dec. 1932, Maiskii, *Izbrannaia perepiska*, I, pp. 377, 387–88.

⁵ Maiskii to A. A. Nesterova, 17 Sept. 1930, *ibid.*, pp. 370–71.

Molotov commented once about Stalin and World War II that no one could say for certain what he was thinking.⁶ Did he really confide in anyone, unless it was his inner demons? If Molotov hesitated to say what Stalin was thinking, and he knew Stalin perhaps best of all, should not historians be careful, perhaps not quite so categorical, in their assessments of his motives in foreign policy? Don't forget that what Stalin *said* sometimes may have concealed what he actually *thought*.

With that, I have had my say on the matters to hand. I have given my reading of the balance of forces in Soviet foreign policy-making on the basis of first-hand consultation of the archival documents, unmediated by western 'Kremlinology' based on educated guesses and foreign archives alone. Others can fill in gaps, or respond to questions that I have not answered. History is a big tent; there is lots of room for everyone who wants to be there. You, the readers, can decide on the merits of this particular case. But before you do, please ponder the evidence adduced in *Silent Conflict*, for we have only just scratched the surface of it in this forum. Thanks to the H-Diplo editors and especially to Professors Filitov, Haslam, and Overy for taking the time to read my book through and to offer their comments.

As for me, I have just been to Moscow again to try my luck at the AVPRF. Archivists promised me new files to read and they certainly kept their word. I am moving on to write the book I originally intended on the creation of the Grand Alliance. It should cover the period from the early thirties to 1942 or so, building upon and refining what I have already written on that subject over the last quarter of a century.

⁶ Albert Resis (ed.), *Molotov Remembers, Inside Kremlin Politics, Conversations with Felix Chuev* (Chicago, 1993), p. 31.