

The Uses and Limits of Restraint

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A steady stream of books and articles about the character and course of U.S.-Soviet relations since World War II continues to appear. Newly available materials about the early days of the cold war and debates about the pros and cons of détente have lately stimulated authors from various disciplines to search for new explanations and interpretations. The often heavily ideological revisionism of the Fifties and Sixties, when a number of writers set out to reverse the official and conventional version of events, is now being replaced (at least to a degree) by more detached efforts to explore the issues and the motives of the principal actors thirty years ago. Daniel Yergin's *Shattered Peace* (Houghton Mifflin; 526 pp.; \$15.00) is one of the best written, thoroughly researched, and copiously documented of the new studies.

Yergin sets out to trace the points of contention between what he argues were the two basic strands of American analysis of Soviet purposes and their policy corollaries in the mid and late Forties—if not, indeed, ever since. Except in his brief epilogue, Yergin sticks quite rigorously to the events prior to 1950, though his story is plainly intended to be pertinent to more recent controversies, about which he has written prolifically elsewhere. Inevitably, as Yergin himself would probably acknowledge, the neat packaging of diverse views into two sets of “axioms” does injustice to nuances and variations within the contending groups. But for analytical purposes at least his approach is useful and innovative.

On one side Yergin identifies the “Riga Axioms,” named after the group of American Soviet experts who worked at the U.S. legation in the Latvian capital before the establishment of diplomatic relations and the installation of diplomatic missions in Moscow and Washington made direct observation feasible. In this view the USSR was committed to world revolution and unlimited expansion, the U.S. was required to be ever vigilant, and any hope for some form of *modus vivendi* rested on a fundamental transformation of the Soviet system.

In time this view of Soviet purposes and policies would require the U.S. to adopt the policies of containment and quarantine, building positions of strength

around the Soviet perimeter, intervening to curb Soviet influence wherever it appeared, persecuting Communists and fellow-travelers at home, and establishing what Yergin calls the national security state, which geared virtually all our foreign and defense policy endeavors to meeting the Soviet threat. Negotiation, the demarcation and balancing of interests, and, even more, the possibilities of one or another form of cooperation—all these, as Yergin sees it, had little or no role in this conception. It was, in fact, close to a mirror image of the Stalinist “two-camp” theory.

On the other side of the gulf Yergin places the “Yalta Axioms,” which were identified with Franklin Roosevelt, at least in the mid and later war years. These, says Yergin, emphasized “the imperatives of statehood in Soviet policy, rather than the role of ideology...the proposition that a totalitarian domestic system did not inevitably and necessarily give rise to a totalitarian foreign policy.” In this view there was less coherence and purposefulness in the Kremlin’s international behavior than ascribed to it by the “Riga Axioms,” and there was scope for postwar accommodations and “business-like relations,” for the Soviet Union would be chiefly preoccupied with reconstruction and “desperately interested in stability, order and peace.” Both sets of Yergin’s axioms presupposed some kind of division of the world, but the Yalta group assumed room for bargaining and interaction, whereas the Riga school inclined to “rollback” and Wilsonian visions of world order that required fundamental changes in the USSR.

Yergin notes complications: Roosevelt publicly proclaimed what we would now call “world order” politics, with what eventually became the U.N. General Assembly as the chief instrumentality, though in reality he envisioned a peace guaranteed by great power collaboration, with the Security Council as its basic instrument. The Riga group, on the other hand, was not averse to talking with the Russians and to launching proposals for a European settlement or control of nuclear arms, but in fact it assumed that in the end only strength and confrontation could protect us and prevent us from being lulled into a false sense of security.

A large part of Yergin’s story has to do with the gradual shift in American approaches and policies from one set of views to the other as issue after issue became deadlocked and Soviet behavior, in the view of American policymakers, seemed to fit increasingly into the Riga pattern. The debates that

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attended the process have a familiar ring. "One-way street," "give-aways," "secret agreements," "spheres of influence" all appear in the writings and remarks of the Riga group as it stabs at the illusions of the Yalta adherents. And the latter talk of the inutility of nuclear weapons, of Soviet reasons to question U.S. intentions, and of what we would now call self-fulfilling prophecies.

Only rarely does Yergin permit himself to look back to pass judgments of his own. Where he does, he clearly inclines toward the Yalta approach as he defines it. But for the most part Soviet conduct is assessed through the prisms of contemporary observers. George Kennan's Rigaesque conclusions figure prominently, as do those of other officials whose views were formed in the rigors of Moscow service during the purges. It is one of the disappointments of Yergin's work that the battles seem largely to be fought in the pages of official memoranda and speeches. Only occasionally in the first two-thirds of the book do other actors intrude: a few senators, an occasional journalist, the academics associated with the "totalitarian model."

Yergin is of course correct in noting at the outset that he had no access to Soviet archives and to whatever internal debates may have taken place in Moscow. (It is intriguing to speculate on how much credence Western scholars would place on Soviet archives, if any were to be released by the Kremlin.) Yet there is ample primary and secondary material about Soviet actions and views as reflected in the Soviet press and in Soviet policies. Moreover, as Yergin's comprehensive bibliography shows, he is far from ignorant of the important Western scholarship of recent years about Soviet developments in the Forties or of the mounting volume of testimony from emigrés who lived through the early postwar years.

It would have been interesting not only to read about the conclusions that people like Kennan and Harriman drew from Soviet policies and events but to have more explicit references to the events themselves. As it is, the American assessments recounted by Yergin sometimes seem to hang in midair, and it is often difficult for the present-day reader to tell how the analysts of thirty years ago arrived at their dire or pessimistic conclusions. For example, it is hard to tell from Yergin's rather cursory account of the Soviet "election" speeches of early 1946 why Stalin's comments on Soviet policies had such a profound impact and are even today regarded by some as major opening salvos in the cold war. The dissociation of analysis from evidence makes Yergin's account of the evolution of American policy and of the cold war relationship incomplete, and it leaves some key developments shrouded in mist.

What precisely was the train of events that eventually led Secretary of State Byrnes to shift from "Yalta" to "Riga"? Yergin cites domestic political factors but little else. Indeed, despite Yergin's often perceptive and skillful thumbnail character sketches, there is relatively little effort to probe in depth to account for the widespread consensus among leading Americans—many of them lawyers and investment bankers of moderate political views—about Soviet objectives and the policies needed to deal with them. We miss a discussion of the

relationship between actual events and what went on in the minds of these men. And there is very little in Yergin's work to prepare us for the eventual shift of some of the high priests of the "Riga axioms," such as Kennan, Bohlen, and Harriman, to more flexible approaches. It is at least worth noting that well before the disenchantments of Vietnam, key members (by Yergin's reckoning) of the Riga school had become staunch advocates of negotiation, arms control, and what came to be known much later as *détente*. It is at least conceivable that despite the quotations Yergin so meticulously provides, these men did not in fact fit quite as neatly as he intimates into the Riga package.

There must also be here a methodological problem with which historians must wrestle increasingly. It is quite conceivable that much of the soul-searching and discussion of choices went on in informal contact among the people concerned. Even with the appearance of oral histories, to which Yergin commendably refers, it may become increasingly difficult for historians to reconstruct complex and painful decision processes. Formal memoranda may not necessarily reflect the full views of their authors or express whatever ambivalence there may be in their judgments. They may be written by officials for harried superiors, or for a particular purpose, and tailored accordingly. Of course the period Yergin writes about antedates the era of Freedom of Information and of the massive leak, an era in which sensitive and complex issues are frequently discussed with less than full candor in formal papers, and in which discussions in committees, with notetakers present, are often constrained by fears of publicity. Yet the long personal association of many of Yergin's principal actors—made all the more intimate, if not always harmonious, by common wartime exertions—makes it quite probable that many of their debates occurred in private and were not necessarily recollected with precision and nuance in later memoirs and oral histories.

As he proceeds Yergin does note that in some instances evidence was open to varying interpretations. But he does this largely to question the conclusions of the actors of the time who increasingly embraced the "Riga" view. Even if one shares what is evidently Yergin's view—that Soviet policies were less purposeful than the totalitarian model would have it—one can still take note, as many did at the time, of the vigor and brutality with which Stalin moved to implant Soviet practices and Soviet-style institutions on the areas occupied by the Red Army, or the purposefulness with which emphasis shifted within the USSR from wartime appeals to nationalism to Communist dogma. One need not dispute Yergin's view that the war-ravaged USSR was far weaker than generally perceived or claimed in the West to note the Soviet commitment—virtually from the beginning of the postwar period, if not from the wartime period itself—to major military programs doubtless designed to secure the USSR's new periphery but inevitably with impact beyond it. And one need not reject the proposition that Soviet expansionism developed only gradually and haphazardly as opportunities beckoned to recognize that from the earliest period Stalin seemed increasingly persuaded that the security of

Soviet-controlled territory almost required the insecurity of the regions adjacent to it.

But it must be said emphatically and in Yergin's favor that in the process of faulting the views, and hence the policies, of the postwar American leadership he generally falls quite short of the practice of earlier revisionists, who neatly fit their stories into the preconceived notion that American leaders manufactured a Soviet threat to mask their own imperialist ambitions for a Pax Americana based on domination by American corporations and buttressed by nuclear weapons invented and used not to end the war but to intimidate the Russians.

Yergin does come close to some of these earlier revisionist stereotypes, however, in his description of the emergence of the so-called national security state in the U.S. For here he seems to forego a search for more complex reasons and the acknowledgment of uncertainties and doubts in favor of frequently flat assertions that threats were invented to fuel the rivalries of the Services and to rescue the failing fortunes of the war industries, especially in the aviation field. There is no doubt that the emerging view of the Soviet threat—and the analogies drawn between Nazi and Soviet totalitarianism—bore significantly on the conclusion of the principal figures in the Truman administration that the U.S. would henceforth have to view its security in broader terms than the simple territorial defense of the United States against clear and present dangers.

But Soviet military power had in fact established itself farther West than ever before; Soviet forces were occupying parts of northern Iran; there was a Soviet military presence in parts of China; there were Soviet claims to the former colonies of Italy and to a piece of control over the Turkish Straits; Communist parties were instruments of Soviet power, even if they were not as effective as feared; the USSR was ruled by a dictator and its purposes were at the very least open to concern because of the revolutionary rhetoric in which they were couched; and even in Roosevelt's lifetime U.S.-Soviet amity had long since passed its peak and seemed plainly destined to be replaced by a rivalry the likes of which Americans had never faced before. Whatever the role of inter- or even intraservice rivalries, industrial interests, distorted perceptions, or particular personalities, these were realities of the postwar international landscape that could hardly escape the notice of political leaders and the public at large.

But other factors were at work too that spelled a change of traditional American defense and foreign policy.

The U.S. had entered two world wars in an age when it could still afford to wait until dangers had become imminent and palpable (though, in fact, Roosevelt had already broadened traditional U.S. views of defense by his *de facto* intervention against Germany in 1940-41, by the destroyer-for-bases deal, and by establishing the U.S. as the "arsenal of democracy"). But during the war military technology had moved ahead by leaps and bounds. Both the range and the explosive power of

weapons systems had increased by several orders of magnitude, and other technologies—for example, in the fields of communications and radar—had given global scope to strategy and warfare. And even if no single “threat” had emerged, there would have been powerful motives for continued U.S. involvement in a disorderly world, one in which the great powers of the previous century or more were prostrate and on the verge (though not without U.S. prodding) of divesting themselves of colonial holdings. These factors have little place in Yergin’s account of the genesis of the “national security state.” One might well conclude that a different assessment of the Soviet threat would have brought about U.S. demobilization that extended not only to our ground forces in Europe and Asia but also, more fully than was the case, to our naval and air forces and to the technological and industrial enterprises that sustained them. Nonetheless, a broader U.S. view of national security and of the forces necessary to sustain it would almost certainly have emerged in the postwar world.

Many of Yergin’s reviewers have asserted that the growth of the so-called national security state, based on a supposedly exaggerated if not altogether misconstrued Soviet/Communist threat, drove the U.S. ineluctably to excessive militarization, witchhunts, the “imperial presidency,” Vietnam, and Watergate. That excesses, errors, and anguish are earmarks of the generation following Yergin’s story is obvious—as is the fact that we are still paying the price. Yergin himself does not argue that the history of the Fifties, Sixties, and Seventies followed inevitably on the manner in which issues were perceived and acted upon in the Forties. But he plainly feels that the threat was exaggerated and that there were other, more preferable options for the U.S. than those chosen.

Yergin does not, however, attempt systematically to analyze such options, nor, indeed, does he tell us very much about the options considered at the time, except for the crude alternative of negotiation and trust on the one hand and militarized containment on the other. And he

does not put in the balance the numerous accomplishments associated with containment: a revitalized Europe; Franco-German understanding unlike any known for centuries; institutions that, for all their flaws, constitute at least the building blocks of international order as well as justice; and American involvement in the world, not just as a military power but as a source of innovation and (with lapses) of inspiration.

But Yergin did not set out to provide final judgments—and he acted wisely in this, for we plainly lack either the detachment or the perspective that would allow us to reach them. He does suggest a salutary lesson we would ignore at our peril as we chart our course for the years ahead. Having set up his own simplified scheme to analyze the debates and choices of the Forties, he rightly asks whether the evidence could not have been read differently and, above all, whether the choices might not have been different. He does not go much beyond the questions in this volume, and he cannot be held responsible for answers given by others—though it must be said that some of his questions are leading ones.

But as we conduct our own debates and elaborate our strategies and policies in the shadow of growing Soviet military power it is worth remembering that this is not all there is to Soviet reality. The military power of the USSR today, while enormous, is not unblemished and is balanced by our own. In expanding into the world the USSR has acquired not only influence but also vulnerabilities and needs. Soviet hopes and goals abroad have rarely become reality. Although it does not share our notions of order, justice, and liberty, the Soviet Union cannot escape constraints imposed by external power or the influences of external forces for change. It is within our capacity to help shape an international system in which restraint in the use of power and the pursuit of interests has its benefits, the absence of such restraint its penalties. In such a system there is room for the Soviets—for no state, even one with great power and ambition, can now act in isolation and in disregard of the power and aspirations of others.

Auschwitz: Beginning of a New Era? edited by Eva Fleishner

(KTAV Publishing House: 468 pp.; \$17.50/\$8.95)

John B. Sheerin

The Holocaust was ghastly enough in itself but the martyrdom will have been in vain if we do not face up to the repercussions yet to emerge from the depths of depravity revealed in the slaughter at Auschwitz. This is the overriding theme of a collection of papers on the Holocaust delivered at a symposium at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine, New York City, in June, 1974.

This future-oriented volume is the product of Christian and Jewish theologians, philosophers, historians, poets, and mystics. Among the contributors are such familiar names as Gregory Baum, Rosemary Ruether, Walter Burghardt, Elie Wiesel, Emil Fackenheim, Arthur Waskow, Shlomo Avineri. As editor and authority on the Holocaust, Eva Fleishner has judi-

ciously arranged the ten main papers with their responses and with helpful introductions to each chapter.

Several contributors take as their point of departure the question: “Can one remain a Christian or Jew after Auschwitz and still retain intellectual integrity?” This leads into the sequel, “And if one cannot remain a believing Jew or Christian, what faith is left?”