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# American-Soviet Relations: From the Russian Revolution to the Fall of Communism, by Peter G. Boyle

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*American-Soviet Relations: From the Russian Revolution to the Fall of Communism.* By Peter G. Boyle. New York: Routledge, 1993. xiv, 321 pp. Index. Paper.

Peter Boyle is lecturer in American History at the University of Nottingham and the author of numerous articles on relations between the US, Britain and the Soviet Union. *American-Soviet Relations* is his latest work and his first look at the entire sweep of relations between the US and Soviet Russia. Based on a wide reading of secondary sources and published document collections with an emphasis on the American side, this book is an excellent survey in the tradition of John Lewis Gaddis's *America, Russia, and the Soviet Union* (1978), particularly for nonspecialists.

Boyle sets out in the wake of the end of the cold war and the collapse of the Soviet Union to answer the question "Why was the relationship between the two superpowers so difficult?" His answer, judiciously phrased and carefully nuanced, is essentially that both countries were obsessed with extending the range of their own ideology and protecting their own systems. Thus, no real coexistence or compromise was possible for any extended period until the collapse of one or the other. Boyle does tend to side with the so-called "post-revisionists" in that he places greater blame for the origins of the cold war on Soviet actions in the immediate postwar period. But he has a sharp analysis of American anti-communism as well, and he argues forcefully that domestic American politics contributed heavily to the virulence and depth of cold-war antagonism.

The book's major weakness is its analysis of Soviet strategy and policies. Not only does it fail to take advantage of recent studies utilizing newly opened Soviet archives, such as the variety of excellent papers of the Cold War International History Project, but it also contains an inadequate coverage of published documents, scholarly articles and monographs on Soviet foreign policy and its contribution to the cold war.

Boyle's ideological emphasis sometimes blinds him to the strength of other forces in the relationship. For example, he argues that the early years were dominated by Lenin-Wilson hostility, downplaying the divided allies and their lack of concerted intent in intervention on the one hand, and the burgeoning economic ties of the 1920s on the other. Likewise in the Eisenhower era, while he does not fall into the trap of equating Secretary of State John Foster Dulles's anti-communist rhetoric with Eisenhower's policy, he underplays the very real first efforts of détente between Ike and Nikita Khrushchev in 1954-1955, and Ike's role in the preliminaries of the nuclear test ban negotiations in the late 1950s.

Boyle's overreliance on the American side also weakens his otherwise important analysis of the end of the cold war. He rightly rejects those who would give sole credit to American military expansion and Ronald Reagan for the sea changes of the late 1980s. Yet his efforts to bring out Mikhail Gorbachev's key role are hampered by his lack of attention to the "new thinking" in Soviet foreign policy and its impact on Soviet military posture, negotiating stance and support for client states in the third world. Boyle rightly emphasizes the role of people-to-people "citizen diplomacy" of the Reagan era but he devotes surprisingly little attention to the European anti-nuclear movement and its pressure on both European governments and the superpowers to stop the deployment of intermediate nuclear forces in Europe and to rescue *Ostpolitik*.

Despite these weaknesses and any personal disagreements in analysis which I may have, Boyle's synthesis is first-rate. This is the best single-volume, easily accessible account of Soviet-American relations now in print. It should be required reading for both undergraduates and graduate students in courses in Soviet-American relations, US foreign relations and Russian foreign policy; as well as for policymakers and all students of history.

Its final conclusion rings true. While, "On the whole, containment was successful," the US should "resist the temptation to go beyond containment and to embark upon a quest for universal conversion to American-style democracy and free-enterprise capitalism." Rather policy makers should seek "a world safe for pluralism, with coexistence between differing political, religious, social and economic systems."

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