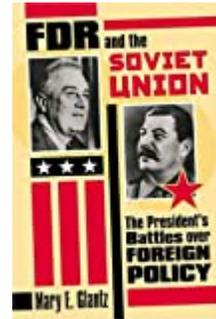


Mary E. Glantz. *FDR and the Soviet Union: The President's Battles over Foreign Policy.* Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2005. vii + 253 pp. \$34.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7006-1365-6.



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FDR Fights the Bureaucrats but the Bureaucrats Always Win

One of the most enduring controversies over the origins of the Cold War remains the question of what would have happened had the American president Franklin Delano Roosevelt lived into the postwar era. FDR, known for his finesse and acumen, had built a relationship with Soviet premier Joseph Stalin over four painstaking years of war and it seems likely that, had FDR lived, this would have served both sides well as they set out to remake the world anew. But with FDR's untimely, though perhaps not unsurprising, death in early April 1945, what might have been became what will never be known. Since then debate has raged over whether FDR's death served as a turning point that made the Cold War all but inevitable. The reason is the accession to power of Harry S Truman, a president who was not only ignorant of the agreements that FDR had made with Stalin, but also virulently anti-communist and given to a black-and-white view of the world. Here the debate fragments in several directions. Some hold that these attributes of Truman alone made it likely that the wartime coalition would disintegrate. Others, that the death of FDR and the rise of Truman gave the more anti-Soviet-inclined members of the upper echelons of power influence that previously had been denied them,

thereby condemning Allied cooperation to the trash heap of history. Still others insist that FDR's death made little difference, as it was Stalin's actions that sowed the seeds of discord among the Allies, something FDR was becoming aware of as he unknowingly approached his death.

Enter into the fray Mary E. Glantz's *FDR and the Soviet Union: The President's Battles over Foreign Policy*. Part of the University of Kansas Press Modern War Studies series, Glantz does not resolve the issue once and for all (no one will likely ever do that), but she provides solid evidence and persuasive argumentation to make her case. More on this to come. The "reverse course controversy" is, however, not the sole, nor even the primary, focus of her work. Rather, her aim is to analyze the role that lower-level U.S. bureaucrats played in formulating U.S. policy toward the Soviet Union from the 1920s through World War II. It is Glantz's contention that these individuals and their impact on policy have largely been ignored and that putting them into the story "add[s] a new dimension to our understanding of the complex Soviet-American relationship" (p. 5). Indeed, the book might better have been titled *FDR, the State Department, and*

the Soviet Union or simply, *The State Department and the Soviet Union*, so much is the focus on these individuals. FDR appears largely in the background, emerging now and again to ruffle the feathers of the bureaucrats, but not as much of a prominent actor in his own right.

Glantz utilizes a narrative approach that is fairly easy to summarize. During the “era of non-recognition,” roughly 1917 to 1933, U.S. policy toward the Soviet Union was largely dictated by the State Department’s Division of Eastern European Affairs and “its new generation of Russian experts,” men who would play a prominent role in the origins of the Cold War such as George Kennan and Charles Bohlen (p. 11). Director of the division was Robert F. Kelley, a virulent anti-communist who, according to Glantz, set out to develop a cadre of foreign service officers as equally anti-communist as he. Apparently, he succeeded. Throughout the 1920s and into the 1930s Kelley’s and his division’s views of the Soviet Union largely prevailed with the Republican-controlled White House. Even the onset of the Depression did not change matters. When FDR took over the presidency in 1933, however, he reversed this policy, recognized the Soviet Union, and sought to foster trade between the two nations. The career foreign service officers in the Far Eastern Division greatly disliked Roosevelt’s decisions and they worked throughout the 1930s to undermine support for Soviet-American relations and to cast the Soviet Union in the worst possible light. Thus, from the start tension and bifurcation characterized the decision-making process within the U.S. government with regards to U.S.-Soviet relations. When Hitler’s successful conquest of France left the British as the only bulwark against the Nazi hordes and FDR began making overtures to the Soviet Union on the premise that it would be a useful ally in a war against Germany, relations between the State Department and the White House completely ruptured, according to Glantz. Throughout the early part of the war the U.S. embassy in Moscow continued its policy of trying to undermine U.S.-Soviet cooperation and cast the Soviet Union as more foe than friend. This caused FDR to largely abandon it and its ambassador in favor of his own personal diplomacy. He gathered around him men who were far more sympathetic and, at least according to Glantz, reasonable in their assessment of the Soviet Union. This effort to undermine the State Department and the Moscow embassy only furthered the discord among the various parties.

The primary issue throughout the duration of the war was whether aid to the Soviet Union, such as under Lend-Lease, should be determined based on reciprocity

or solely on helping the Soviet Union to survive and win. The issue was confounded from the start by the stark reality that no one knew if the Soviet Union would be able to withstand the German onslaught. Both the Moscow embassy and the War Department expressed deep skepticism. As Glantz sees it, this explains FDR’s initial hesitation in supplying aid virtually without question to the Soviets, as he would have preferred. It is likely, according to Glantz, that FDR believed that requiring a quid pro quo from the Soviet Union when it was fighting a life-or-death war was both immoral and unwise. From the start, FDR fought World War II with an eye to the peace, and he believed the postwar world would require contending with the Soviets, assuming they withstood the Germans. The question was would that be as friend or foe. Asking for reciprocity would hardly be conducive to friendly relations. But if the Soviets were defeated what would be the point? For their part, the State Department, the Moscow embassy, and the War Department continued to argue that the Soviets could not survive even when it became obvious that they would. Such were the ideological blinders that members of these agencies wore. But as the weeks rolled on without a Soviet capitulation FDR decided to act. Lend-Lease would henceforth be delivered to the Soviet Union without strings attached.

From this point until the tide turned against the Germans in 1943, Lend-Lease made its way to the Soviets without strings attached. Accomplishing this feat required FDR to set up a new organization, the Office of Lend-Lease Administration, independent of State and the Moscow embassy, a situation that infuriated the new ambassador Admiral William H. Standley and ultimately led to a bitter public fight and the decision by FDR to completely streamline the Moscow embassy. After 1943 FDR had to rethink his policy toward the Soviet Union because it was “no longer a supplicant fighting for its survival” (p. 143). Now FDR was, according to Glantz, finally able to put his personal diplomacy to work (p. 142). While FDR pursued this route, for better or for worse (Glantz does not say), for the remainder of the war his efforts to straighten out the Moscow embassy proved futile, despite even the shake-up. Glantz’s point here, which is one of her theses, is that presidents have little power to challenge institutional biases despite the power they have to change personnel. Although he placed his good friend and confidant Averell Harriman in the position of ambassador, Harriman found that in fact he needed to rely on the old guard because they were the only people who knew a whit about the Soviets. This being the case, the old bias against all things Soviet reared its ugly

head even as Harriman, at least in Glantz's estimation, initially sought cooperation with the Soviets. She cites the influence of the old guard and Stalin's decision not to intervene in the Warsaw uprising as pushing Harriman toward the anti-Soviet side. These things stood when FDR died, paving the way for the anti-Soviet faction to once again dictate Soviet policy. Although Glantz argues that "there is no straight line from Harriman's April 1945 conversation with Truman [briefing the new president for the first time on Soviet matters] to the adoption of Kennan's policy of 'containment' of the Soviet Union" (p. 179), she forcefully concludes that Harriman persuaded the president to adopt the very course that Roosevelt had been struggling against throughout the war (p. 176). And there the narrative ends.

It is in her conclusion that Glantz explains the import of all this, which, frankly, this reviewer found himself asking on more than one occasion. Glantz contends that it is "impossible to ignore the often pivotal role of lower-level officials in the policy formulation process" (pp. 179-180), which for her proves the "validity of the theory of bureaucratic politics" as developed by Graham T. Allison's study of the Cuban Missile Crisis, that leaders, even presidents, are constrained by bureaucracies in modern democratic states (p. 182). Indeed, Glantz ably demonstrates that FDR faced many bureaucratic hurdles in implementing his policies toward the Soviet Union and that, in the end, the bureaucracy proved the more enduring, highlighting what might be taken as her main thesis that "foreign policy is not simply the prerogative of the president," no less for FDR, who has been accused by more than a few critics of on the left and the right of possessing virtual dictatorial powers in his prosecution of the war (p. 184). She further contends that a focus on bureaucrats high and low reinforces "the importance of individuals to history" (p. 182). Here she strikes one of her most important insights, although it is not an original one. Against historian Daniel Yergin's thesis concerning the "Riga axioms" (the belief that peaceful coexistence with the Soviet Union was impossible) and the "Yalta axioms" (the belief that peaceful coexistence with the Soviet Union was essential), Glantz contends that a better marker of the two approaches is generational. FDR's outlook was shaped by World War I and the tragedy of Versailles; the younger foreign service officers, by Munich and the Nazi-Soviet pact.[1] It is a consideration well worth remembering.

One of Glantz's expressed goals in writing this book is to offer her audience—diplomatic historians, political scientists, state department and other government officials—a way to see that wartime diplomacy is not im-

mune from the twists and turns of the battlefield. She claims that most diplomatic historians have neglected the military sphere in writing about the diplomacy of World War II, a charge seconded by Mark Stoler, former president of the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations.[2] While the charge may be valid this reviewer did not find Glantz's occasional forays into discussions of particular battles very enlightening. Most diplomatic historians recognize, for instance, that once the battle for Stalingrad turned against the Germans the war, and the diplomacy associated with it, abruptly changed. It is not altogether clear, at least from reading Glantz, that getting the details is necessary to the story she is telling. It may be that it is, but Glantz has not demonstrated, to this reader's satisfaction, why.

Glantz's book will not satisfy everyone. Some will take objection to her overly sympathetic view of the Soviet position. One example will suffice to make the point, although it is by no means the only one extant. Discussing the failure of U.S.-Soviet cooperation from Munich to Barbarossa, she concludes that the Nazi-Soviet pact was in many ways the consequence of a self-fulfilling prophecy [on the part of the western powers], that "the perceptions of U.S. diplomats were flawed on many levels," that their "anti-Bolshevism led them to discount the possibility of the Soviet Union as a partner," and that "they hesitated to negotiate in completely good faith" (p. 46). She further implies that the United States, along with Britain and France, "underestimated the worth of the Soviet Union as an ally" without mentioning Stalin's purge of the Soviet military in 1937-38 (p. 46). In taking a sympathetic view of the Soviet Union, and consequently of FDR's policies versus those of the State and War Departments, Glantz's work is the virtual reverse of Dennis Dunn's 1998 book on U.S. ambassadors to the Soviet Union, a book that Glantz might have addressed head-on.[3] Where for Glantz FDR is the protagonist and the bureaucrats the antagonists, in Dunn's reading the opposite holds true. Indeed, at times Glantz moves out the role of historian and into the role of judge in her defense of FDR's policies. In one instance she oddly characterizes a report sent by ambassador Laurence Steinhardt suggesting, against the State and War Departments which she denigrates, that the Soviets would likely survive the German onslaught as an excellent analysis (p. 70). Historians are certainly free to offer such judgments, but in Glantz's case it reveals a bias that is too apparent and that will likely cause some to reject her book on grounds that it amounts to little more than propaganda. Despite this flaw, however, the book

offers convincing evidence that in fact FDR had it right and the State and War Departments had it wrong. Which side readers take will likely be a matter of taste.

Although the “reverse course controversy” is not Glantz’s principal objective in writing the book it will likely be the one in which scholars will be most interested. Glantz’s work will provide further grist for the mill for those who contend that Truman did reverse Roosevelt’s policy. In the first instance, Glantz’s FDR is a man who believed the Soviet Union was indispensable to creating a lasting postwar peace. His wartime diplomacy was driven by that consideration, against constant haranguing from the bureaucrats. From telling the Soviets in 1942 that the United States had no issue with Soviet postwar boundaries, to his persistent refusal to attach quid pro quo clauses to Soviet Lend-Lease aid, to securing a pledge of Soviet participation in the war in the Pacific at Yalta, FDR consistently acted towards the Soviets as though he expected postwar cooperation between the two powers. He did so against the advice of Soviet experts in the Moscow embassy and the War Department, and to the point of firing and reorganizing the embassy staff. Thus, Glantz reminds us that to make a case that FDR was rethinking his policy toward the Soviet Union on the eve of his death one would have to discount the preceding years in which he worked so tirelessly to create peace between the two nations, which is no easy task. Although, as is well known, FDR gave mixed signals of his intentions toward the Soviet Union up to the time of his death, Glantz quotes the very telling telegram FDR sent to Winston Churchill on April 11, a day before he died, in which he “minimiz[ed] the general Soviet problem,” as his last testament with regards to the Soviet Union. What can be said of FDR at the very least, against those who would contend that he was moving toward non-cooperation, is that we still do not know what he would have done. But while it can never be known

where FDR was heading—toward peaceful coexistence or toward hostility—what Glantz does show is that the anti-Soviet view, long nurtured in the bowels of the State Department and the Moscow embassy, only achieved ranking status once FDR was “out of the way,” as it were (my words, not Glantz’s). The new president listened only to Harriman and the other anti-Soviet bureaucrats. FDR’s voice was nowhere to be found. Given this, it is unlikely that the things could have turned out any other way. Stalin was not the only one who proved stubborn in the immediate postwar era.

For those who like good, old-fashioned diplomatic history this book will be a pleasure to read. It is a straightforward foray into diplomatic correspondence, memoranda, intelligence files, and the personal papers of key figures. The sources are accepted virtually without question. Culture is nowhere to be found, save in the conclusion where Glantz attempts add some layers to her diplomats. Her primary sources are all American and British, with a smattering of published Russian sources. Foreign relations specialists, FDR and World War II aficionados, and students of the policymaking process (undergraduate, graduate, and professional) will find the book of interest.

Notes

[1]. Daniel Yergin, *Shattered Peace: The Origins of the Cold War and the National Security State* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977).

[2]. Mark Stoler, “War and Diplomacy: Or, Clausewitz for Diplomatic Historians,” *Diplomatic History* 29 (2005): 1-26.

[3]. Dennis J. Dunn, *Caught between Roosevelt and Stalin: Americas Ambassadors to Moscow* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1998).

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