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Alexandra Richie. *Warsaw 1944: Hitler, Himmler, and the Warsaw Uprising.* New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2013. Illustrations. 738 pp. $40.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-374-28655-2.

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Western audiences often interpret the Warsaw Uprising of August and September 1944 as Joseph Stalinâs attempt to kill off a Polish independence movement by having the Germans do his dirty work. For other Westerners, it is a mere anecdote to the otherwise inexorable march of the Alliesâ victory over Nazi Germany. As Alexandra Richie shows in her *Warsaw 1944*, it was more than that to the Poles, the Germans, and the Grand Alliance. Richie places the uprising within the larger scope of World War II and reveals the calculus of forces that influenced the decisions to launch the uprising, the Germansâ reaction, and the uprisingâs eventual defeat.

Richie argues that three events influenced the course of the Warsaw Uprising. The first was the widespread, but mistaken, Polish belief that the Germans were on their last legs by mid-1944 after the Sovietsâ successful Operation BAGRATION, which heavily influenced the decisions to launch the uprising. Secondly, the plot to kill Adolf Hitler by the Wehrmacht led to the elevation of Heinrich Himmler, head of the SS, to handle the Warsaw Uprising. Third, Richie argues that Field Marshal Walter Modelâs counteroffensive, which began hours before the uprising, wholly prevented the Soviets from assisting the Poles and allowed the Germans to quell the uprising.

As a whole, she deftly mixes macro-level events of leaders in London, Moscow, Berlin, and Warsaw with the ground-level events in Warsaw and throughout Belorussia. In the first fifth of the book, Richie convincingly lays out how these decisions, experiences, and perceptions strongly influenced the course of the Warsaw Uprising.

Although it is clear that Richie is fond of Poland, she is critical of the senior leadership of the Armia Krajowa (AK). Richie portrays the AK commander, General Tadeusz Komorowski, known simply as âBÃ³r,â as a good man but not the right man to lead the AK. She describes other AK commanders, such as General Antoni ChruÅciel as a misinformed, poor leader more interested in his place in history than actual leadership. Richie also describes the nearly impossible situation that BÃ³r faced in late July. Polish leaders were aware that the Soviets disapproved of an independent, democratic Poland, but the Polesâ failure to launch an uprising might have signaled to the Soviets that the AK was âineffectualâor worse, had even collaborated with the Germansâ (p. 165). Knowing the political reality of Soviet suspicions toward Poland, realizing that the AK could not do anything, understanding that the AK would not receive any outside help, and influenced by a mistaken belief of imminent German defeat, a reluctant BÃ³r decided to roll the dice and order

the uprising.

The uprising takes up the rest of the book. From a faulty starting point, the AK launched the uprising on August 1. Richie shows the AKâs early successes but demonstrates that it was doomed to fail from the beginning. As the German garrison stopped the AK attacks, Himmler deployed his SS units to suppress the uprising. Hitler ordered Himmler to end the uprising, so Himmler relied on units that had previously used brutality against Soviet partisans now against the AK and civilians. In great detail, Richie records the mass murders in a western Warsaw suburb as SS units slaughtered men, women, and children regardless of their involvement in the uprising.

As these mass murders slowed down the Germansâ progress, the Russian *osttruppen* deployed as well. In the Ochota suburb, these Russians who fought for the Germans looted and raped their way through the area. Richie recounts these terrifying tragedies in unsparing detail. In the end, Wehrmacht forces were used to flush out the AK troops and force the AKâs surrender by the end of September. The book does not detail the street-by-street movement of the urban combat between the AK and the Germans. Rather, it emphasizes the civiliansâ brutalizing experiences.

Throughout her work, it is clear that the author has a deep love for Poland. To Richie, Poland was clearly a victim of Nazi occupation wherein she observes âthere were no quislings or Polish SS divisions.â While she allows for the occasional âindividual collaboratorsâ who worked for the Germans, nearly all Poles âunwaveringly shared their vision of freedom, democracy, and self-determinationâ (p. 146). Polandâs occupation was more complex than Richie presents. Mark Mazower, in his *Hitlerâs Empire*, writes that 250,000 Polish civil servants ran Poland under 40,000 German officials. Indeed, Mazower suggests, the Nazi occupation of Poland could not have happened without Polish administrative assistance.[1] Mazower does not overturn the âPoland as victimâ interpretation but clearly shows that the situation was far more convoluted. His book does not appear in Richieâs bibliography. Because much of Richieâs data comes from AK veterans unquestionably dedicated to a democratic Poland, it is not surprising that she strikes such a tone toward all Poles.

Another major issue is the place of Poland and the Warsaw Uprising within the Grand Alliance. Like Norman Daviesâs earlier *Rising â44: The Battle for Warsaw* (2003), Richie strongly criticizes the Americans and the British for their failure to stand against Stalin and more actively help Poland. Richie portrays Franklin Delano Roosevelt pandering to the Russian dictator, although it is not clear why. She portrays Winston Churchill as willing but unable to help the Poles, given Britainâs shrinking status as a great power. She depicts Stalin as the Communist dictator longing to âSovietizeâ Central and Eastern Europe (p. 475).

These judgments, however, are made in light of the Cold War that developed after World War II. During the war, a multitude of national interests and changing geostrategic positions influenced how national leaders responded to different issues, which Richie largely fails to recognize. Matters like Poland fell into the maze of coalition politics amid more pressing concerns, such as balancing the warâs demands across multiple fronts and theaters as well as maintaining the direction of the Allied war effort through Europe, the Pacific, and the China-Burma-India theater. In terms of Soviet interests and strategy, she does not consider that Stalin wanted friendly governments bordering the Soviet Union as buffer states and that he was motivated as much by national security fears as by Marxist ideology.

That Roosevelt would concede elements of Polish sovereignty in 1943 and 1944 to Stalin is not altogether surprising given the multifaceted internal dynamics of the Grand Alliance and the Big Three nationsâ changing strategic positions. In his analysis of American wartime leadership, Mark A. Stoler describes why Roosevelt stopped working with Churchill to cooperate more with Stalin. Stoler argues that Roosevelt assessed that Americaâs and the Soviet Unionâs growing wartime strengths would make them the primary leaders in the postwar world, not the British. On the basis of that assessment, Roosevelt sought âto befriend Stalin and establish a basis for postwar cooperation.â If giving up Poland retained Soviet cooperation and achieved his larger goals of a transformed international order, then so be it. Although, to be sure, Stoler points out that Soviet actions in Poland worried senior American leaders.[2] From this view, Roosevelt did not pander to Stalin; he accurately foresaw the geopolitical situation after the war.

The wartime decisions made concerning Poland and the Warsaw Uprising doubtless helped create the preconditions to the Cold WarâRichie calls Warsaw âthe first battle of the Cold Warâ (p. 475)âbut these consequences could not have been known in 1944. Just as the occupation of Poland was more complex than Richie describes, so the coalitional politics within the Grand Alliance and the constituent nationsâ interests, policies, and strategies

were also more intricate than she portrays.

These different interpretations of Poland in World War II have taken on importance in Polish politics and society in the last few years. *Warsaw 1944* generally perpetuates the âPoland as victimâ view but Mazower and Stoler undermine that view. Mazower indicates how Germanyâs occupation of Poland depended on vital Polish assistance. Stoler shows the messy, convoluted reality behind the Grand Alliance where compromises and tough decisions had to be made. These understandings undermine the âPoland as victimâ interpretation, but, at the same time, there is no doubt that Warsawians suffered greatly as Nazi forces massacred, raped, and plundered tens of thousands of civilians. They received minimal outside help during the uprising.

This book is geared toward a general audience who has a strong understanding of World War II in Eastern Europe. Because it is not an academic monograph, it is not rigorously footnoted. Richie relies heavily on primary sources, including many survivorsâ accounts, wartime government documents, and postwar court proceedings. However, it is not always clear from where she has pulled her information. This is not a major complaintâand might be the fault of the publisherâbut one would think that a book with this much information would be more documented than it is.

Finally, Richieâs book succeeds as a narrative that explains and describes what the Warsaw Uprising was like for those who endured those eight weeks of horror. She places the uprising in the context of World War II in Eastern Europe as well as the Grand Alliance. Some of the bookâs interpretations could be tempered by such historians as Mazower, Jan Gross, and Stoler, but these interpretive critiques do not take away from the horrifying experiences endured by Warsawians during the uprising. On the macro level, *Warsaw 1944* reminds us that World War II was much more complex than a simplistic, two-dimensional story of the Allies versus the Axis. On the micro level, it reminds us that that complexity affected tens of thousands of innocent lives in terrible and dreadful ways.

Notes

[1]. Mark Mazower, *Hitlerâs Empire: How the Nazis Ruled Europe* (New York: Penguin Press, 2008), 448-449.

[2]. Mark A. Stoler, *Allies and Adversaries: The Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Grand Alliance, and U.S. Strategy in World War II* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 167.

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