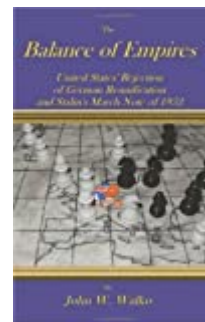


John W. Walko. *The Balance of Empires: United States' Rejection of German Reunification and Stalin's March Note of 1952.* USA: Upublish.com, 2003. Illustrations + maps + notes + bibliography + index. \$19.95 (paper), ISBN 978-1-58112-592-4.



Reviewed by Thomas Maulucci (SUNY Fredonia)

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John W. Walko's study of the American reaction to the 1952 Stalin Notes was published through an "academic textbook publishing on-demand" service. While I do not wish to issue a general condemnation of this new medium, the book under review here unintentionally provides the strongest possible indirect endorsement of peer-reviewed publications. At the heart of its many problems is an outdated and insufficient source base. The few titles listed in the bibliography that postdate the late 1980s have little relevance to the topic, although many important studies have come out since then, especially on the US High Commission in Germany and on Stalin's German policy.

Most startling of all is the author's failure to consult even the Foreign Relations of the United States, the official published collection of American diplomatic documents. Up-to-date and more numerous primary and secondary sources would have made many of the author's speculations unnecessary. The one positive that can be said is that his interpretation of the sources he did use tends to be sound. For example, he correctly concludes that the US government ultimately was unwilling to entertain Stalin's proposal except for propaganda purposes and also that Konrad Adenauer shaped the Western rejection in important ways but did not determine this basic policy. Walko does not think that the notes represented

a "missed opportunity" for reunification. Unsurprisingly, however, none of these insights are new, nor does the author reach them in a methodologically sophisticated way. The narrow and outdated source base alone disqualifies this study as a English-language overview of the topic, which it was the author's intention to provide.[1]

Unfortunately, there is no reason to recommend this book to either specialists or the general public.

Note

[1] For a very good overview analysis of the Stalin Notes and the Western response to them, including a discussion of the historiography through the mid-1990s, see Ruud van Dijk, "The 1952 Stalin Note Debate: Myth or Missed Opportunity for German Unification?", Cold War International History Project Working Paper No. 14, May 1996 (available at the CWIHP webpage, <http://cwihp.si.edu>). Besides the works cited by van Dijk, those interested in US policy on the Stalin Notes should start with John Lewis Gaddis, *We Now Know: Re-thinking Cold War History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 125-129; and Melvyn P. Leffler, *A Preponderance of Power: National Security, the Truman Administration, and the Cold War* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), pp. 457-463. The Stalin Notes remain controversial largely due to continued uncertainty about

Stalin's true intentions towards German unity in 1952, as two recent publications in the *Vierteljahrshefte fuer Zeitgeschichte* make clear: Wilfried Loth, "Das Ende der Legende: Hermann Graml und die Stalin-Note. Eine Entgegnung", *VfZ* 50/4 (2002), pp. 653-664; Jochen Laufer, "Der Friedensvertrag mit Deutschland als Problem der sowjetischen Aussenpolitik. Die Stalin-Note vom 10. März 1952 im Lichte neuer Quellen," *VfZ* 52/1 (2004),

99-118. Only improved access to the archives of the former USSR is likely to resolve once and for all the problem of whether Stalin's reunification offer was sincere. However, most historians (unlike Loth and Rolf Steininger, to name the two most prominent representatives of the contrary thesis) believe that he had no intention of allowing a reunified, democratic Germany in 1952.

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