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Failed Illusions: Moscow, Washington, Budapest, and the 1956 Hungarian Revolt

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reader was taken aback to realize that rather than build revulsion, the accumulation of damning evidence created the same “not my job” effect that allows nations to ignore atrocities against whole peoples.

Slim describes in detail the “seven spheres of civilian suffering”: direct violence (murder, genocide, etc.), rape and sexual violence, forced movement, impoverishment, famine and disease, emotional suffering, and postwar suffering. The book’s most disturbing aspect is the six chapters that describe the painful details about civilian killing. Only one chapter is dedicated to promoting civilian protection. This offers practical expressions of philosopher Howard Gardner’s seven “levers” for changing human minds as Slim’s answer to the dilemma: reason, research, resonance (emotion and morality), representational redescription (shared identity), resources and rewards, real world events, and resistance. Oddly, Slim’s suggestions as to how to apply these levers, such as international criminal courts, fail to resonate with the same passion as the myriad justifications for civilian killing. But this may be the point: killing results from the strongest passions, while the act of sparing life results from the more enduring, yet more difficult to evoke, feelings of mercy, compassion, and love.

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Gati, Charles. *Failed Illusions: Moscow, Washington, Budapest, and the 1956 Hungarian Revolt*. Cold War International History Project. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford Univ. Press, 2006. 264pp. \$49.95

Historians are charged with applying twenty-twenty hindsight to incidents that, at the time, seem to be only a curious combination of blurring events. Charles Gati, a leading commentator on Central European history and politics, does just that in *Failed Illusions*, his study of the abortive Hungarian Revolution of 1956 against the Soviet Union. His book was fifty years in the making, partly because many of his primary sources have only recently been made available. Although he was a firsthand observer of events in Hungary in the 1950s, Gati delayed this work to ensure that it reflected an appropriate level of objectivity. Gati was in Budapest at the time of the revolution, having recently been fired from a state-run newspaper for no ostensible reason. While this made him sympathetic to the revolution, he readily admits to a certain naiveté about why it was happening. This work is largely a result of his personal quest to retrospectively understand this seminal event that shaped his life. He emigrated to the United States shortly after the revolution.

Imre Nagy, prime minister of Hungary and the leader of the revolution, is the story’s protagonist. Through superb usage of primary and personal sources, Gati humanizes this ultimately tragic figure. The book’s most profound insights are in its handling of the decision makers in Moscow and Washington. Moscow possessed the ultimate power and was responsible for the decisions that led to the Soviet invasion of Hungary in November 1956. However, Gati’s use of recently opened records proves conclusively that Soviet leadership was not “trigger happy.” It is eye opening to see just how close the Soviet politburo came to allowing Hungary to

embark on its “Titoist” escapade. The de-Stalinization theme set by the Twentieth Communist Party Congress of the Soviet Union in February 1956 made a major impact on Soviet thinking. Nikita Khrushchev, Anastas Mikoyan, and even such hard-liners as Mikhail Suslov seemed predisposed to allow Budapest a significant degree of autonomy in its interpretation of communism. Were it not for the massacre of party officials in Budapest’s Republic Square, Gati argues, the revolution stood an excellent chance to succeed.

Perhaps the bigger nemesis was Washington. The combined incompetence of the Central Intelligence Agency; the misguided, provocative propaganda of the Radio Free Europe (RFE) team in Munich; and the White House refusal to focus on the plight of Budapest during the Suez crisis created a “perfect storm”—encouraging the Hungarian Revolution without any serious thought of ever supporting it. This would not have been so painful had not 96 percent of all Hungarians, most of whom ravenously devoured the RFE reports, thought that the United States would provide unlimited support for the revolution.

This account certainly warrants reading by history buffs and public policy makers alike. Gati has a way of personalizing the day-by-day accounts of the action in Budapest that makes for an easy read. However, the reader is left with a series of provocative questions. What made the Soviet politburo overturn its decision and ultimately send in tanks to Hungary? Was Washington capable of focusing on more than one flash point at a time? Would at least one fluent Hungarian-speaking CIA agent in Hungary have made a difference in U.S. policy? Fortunately for his readership, Gati

is not short of hindsight on any of these questions.

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Pearlman, Michael D. *Truman and MacArthur: Policy, Politics, and the Hunger for Honor and Renown*. Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 2008. 352pp. \$29.95

Michael D. Pearlman retired in 2006 as professor of history at the Army Command and General Staff College. He now offers a complete history of the political, diplomatic, and military factors leading to President Harry S. Truman’s April 1951 firing of General Douglas MacArthur, Supreme Commander, Far East. A presentation at times overdone for general readers, this scholarly work will interest those who specialize in American strategic and diplomatic decision making from post–World War II through the Korean War.

Problems between Truman and his viceroy in Asia began early in the Korean War. In August 1950 Truman ordered MacArthur to rescind a public statement sent to the annual convention of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, in which MacArthur advocated preserving Taiwan for a future attack on mainland China. This statement was in direct conflict with White House policy to keep the war in Korea limited.

Late in December 1950, after the Chinese attacked across the Yalu River in Korea, MacArthur responded to a Joint Chiefs of Staff message with a counterproposal. He advocated these decisive destructive blows: a blockade of Chinese coastal areas, destruction of Chinese industrial capacities to wage