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Truman and MacArthur: Policy, Politics, and the Hunger for Honor and Renown

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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

war, and Nationalist Chinese forces to counterattack on the mainland.

Early in 1951, when the Chinese communist forces began to falter in the face of tougher American and allied resistance, MacArthur became bolder and attacked the Truman administration's concept of limited war in Korea. On 24 March MacArthur preempted the administration by announcing his willingness to negotiate with enemy commanders.

Truman conferred with his key advisers and a consensus emerged that MacArthur's insubordination called for his dismissal. The occasion, though not the cause, was a letter from MacArthur to Joseph Martin, the senior Republican in the House of Representatives. The letter, which praised a speech of Martin's calling for a second front in China, was read into *The Congressional Record* on 5 April. Six days later, MacArthur was fired.

Pearlman's credentials are manifest. He has produced a thorough account of decision making, bureaucratic and partisan politics, and old grudges and resentments. The latter are sometimes extraneous, but to his credit, he also examines another aspect of the Korean conflict—events behind closed doors in Beijing and Moscow. The work offers valuable information on Sino-Soviet relations during this period, though the author might have expanded on this subject beyond the limited issues of Stalin's fear of an American nuclear attack and his sales of arms to Mao Tse-tung.

In sum, this is a first-rate research effort by a distinguished historian, writing in a lively style that somewhat counterbalances the book's density, and of considerable value and interest to students of the period.

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