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## Post-Communism: Four Perspectives

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Clinton administration. To his credit, the author acknowledges the differences of opinion over the threat and laments that it will be years before we learn just how close the Korean Peninsula came to war—again.

North Korea's aspirations to become a nuclear power have not been completely resolved, and the give-and-take over the 1994 Agreed Framework to "denuclearize" North Korea is likely to be a major issue in American foreign policy toward Northeast Asia for the foreseeable future. The history of the agreement, as detailed by Oberdorfer, will give readers an informed perspective on the complexity of the politics of the Peninsula and likely scenarios for the future as the present Asian financial crisis stresses the implementation of the pact.

Oberdorfer has made a significant contribution to our general knowledge of modern Korea over the last twenty-five years. In fact, it may be the best account yet of the current history of this tragically divided land. This book will help the layman to understand the dynamics of current events on the Korean Peninsula as well as assist policy makers and their staffs make better-informed decisions regarding the unique challenges it will continue to present to Washington and East Asia.

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Mandelbaum, Michael, ed. *Post-Communism: Four Perspectives*. New York:

Council on Foreign Relations,  
1996. 208pp. \$17.95

After seventy-two years, in 1989 communism dissolved before the astonished eyes of the world. Within two years a total of twenty-seven sovereign states emerged from the former Second World. These states have embarked on a journey with a clear destination: the Western club of nations, with their advanced free-market economies, liberal democratic political processes, and international institutions.

Michael Mandelbaum, a Council on Foreign Relations fellow and a professor at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, brings together the perspectives of four leading economists and political scientists in this valuable work. The book offers insights into what is arguably the most important social, political, and economic development of the past several decades: the demise of the Soviet bloc and of communism in Eastern Europe.

Mandelbaum provides a good overview of the transition process and the effect of regional differences on the speed and form of this process. Stephen Holmes and Robert Skidelsky argue that success depends on the adoption of certain policies that will allow a strong central state to arise at the same time as economic markets are developing. John Mueller and Charles Gati, on the other hand, believe that the transition has already completed its initial phase and is in fact essentially complete, although they differ on the result of that transformation.

One underlying factor in the success of the transition within a particular country is the legitimacy, rather than the effectiveness, of a state regime. This

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becomes most apparent when using a regional filter. The three regions of concern—western, eastern, and southern—may have shared recent history, but they have markedly dissimilar pasts. The West (what we call Central Europe) was Habsburg, Catholic, and most susceptible to Western European influences. The East, on the other hand, was Romanov and Orthodox and less affected by such Western movements as the Enlightenment and the Reformation. The South was Ottoman and most removed from the social and cultural influences that affected the other regions. The states most successful in their transition to Western democracies and free economies are those closest geographically, culturally, and historically to the region from whence the definition of success comes. As Mandelbaum puts it, “In the political geography of post-communist Eurasia . . . the countries of the West are struggling to establish effective states while those of the South face the task of creating legitimate ones. The pathology that besets the first group is crime and corruption, the second is plagued by civil war.”

Stephen Holmes argues that the overused term “transition” should be done away with, because it implies that the states involved somehow know where they are headed. That is not the case, he says; the concepts of chaos and fluidity better describe Eastern Europe today. Old habits and mentalities die hard, and these cultural legacies impede progress toward the creation of viable democratic and market institutions.

Holmes remains an optimist, however, and points out the relative lack of extremist political parties in the post-

1989 picture, in contrast to Weimar Germany in a similarly unsettled period. Nevertheless, the administrative decay of state governments combined with the rise in criminal activity make prospects for successful democratic or market institutions problematic. As he puts it, “The Hobbesian problem has to be solved before the Lockean solution looks attractive.” The crisis of ungovernability is the universal and central problem of postcommunist regimes. Liberal pluralism requires a strong state. Only when a government has achieved performance legitimacy by providing basic services and guaranteed liberal civic rights to its populace will its people gain confidence and optimism about the future necessary for a working free-market economy to develop and thrive.

Robert Skidelsky’s chapter focuses on the economic transition from communism to capitalism in Russia. Skidelsky believes that the key to ensuring a successful transformation is first to create the legal and political institutions necessary for a capitalist market economy. This state-building exercise is more important than sequencing particular economic policies in the new states. The problem facing Moscow is that the state effectively lost control of nearly all its revenues, money now going to the various autonomous republics and provinces as well as the informal economy. Communism collapsed, he believes, because the state no longer had the will to enforce the command economy. This loss of centralized economic power is what we really mean when we describe the collapse of the Soviet Union.

John Mueller's central theme is that the new states of Eastern Europe and central Eurasia have completed their transitions to democracy and free market economies. What they have now is probably as close as they are going to get to the Western ideal. The most optimistic writer in this group, he argues that transforming a society is really quite simple, because people are naturally inclined to democracy and markets. They are prevented from achieving those systems only when blocked from doing so by authoritarian power. As Mueller puts it, "Democracy is fundamentally about leaving people free to complain and capitalism is fundamentally about leaving people free to be greedy." The prospects for continued evolution toward these goals are quite good, he suggests.

Charles Gati conducts a tour of new postcommunist societies, rank-ordering the states according to their success in transitioning to democracy and capitalism. His conclusion differs sharply from Mueller's, in that he does not believe many of the new states have achieved either of these goals. The dominant trend of the mid-1990s has been at least partial retrenchment, and most of these states face a future of neither totalitarianism nor democracy but something as yet undefined. The first goal of the revolution, sovereignty, has been largely achieved. The other two goals, however—political pluralism and a market economy—are less certain. Only a few states in Central Europe (and perhaps the Baltics) are likely to succeed in achieving democracy. Governments must deliver the economic goods if they expect to

survive and thrive. By this criteria, most people in the postcommunist world feel cheated. The revolution has not delivered their dreams. Gati provides poll data that shows "discontent so acute and so pervasive as to invite comparison with public sentiments that prevailed prior to the fall of communism. As vast majorities consider the postcommunist course to be a failure, they are bent on checking its direction and arresting its development."

The book's contributors all bring authoritative views to their chapters, and the four perspectives together are a valuable contribution to European area studies. One comes away from this work with a sense of modest pessimism about the future of Russia and many of the other former Soviet states, particularly if one started reading with a preconceived belief that these states will achieve success only if they move to a nation-state system with a democratic, capitalist society much like our own. Such cultural biases are identified and questioned by the authors. At the end, one realizes that perhaps it is not the role of the West, or of the United States, to attempt to push these societies too quickly or with too many demands in the direction of our preconceived notions. A supportive but reactive policy may result in a better international situation than will interventionism.

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mer, eds. *Allies Divided: Transatlantic*