Book Reviews and Summaries

Edited by Kelly Adams


According to this Defense Budget Project report by Gordon Adams, the U.S. defense budget both reflects defense policies and is a mechanism for establishing priorities between the administration and the military services. Debates and compromise in developing the annual defense budget encourage long-term stability and consensus on defense policy, as well as define and maintain the roles and mutual expectations of civilian and military leaders.

This stable and harmonious relationship is, Adams suggests, a fundamental component of a strong democracy. Consequently, the U.S. experience may provide valuable lessons that would help foster this stable relationship in other, newly democratic societies. He writes that “this stability has allowed the development of... understanding and trust between civilian political institutions and the military,... creating a political context in which military coups are virtually unimaginable, while ensuring that resources of some magnitude continue to flow to national defense purposes.”

A substantial portion of this report is devoted to the procedural aspects of the U.S. defense budget process, emphasizing an acknowledged “pecking order” and “deference to experience” in which the military services willingly accept the central role of the civilian defense secretary in resource allocation, and the civilian leadership acknowledges the military’s principal responsibility for resource planning. Although there is an inherent tension in this relationship, Adams suggests that this tension lends predictability to the process.

It is in Congress that the budget request fuels debate over defense spending and policy. Central to this informed discussion is the staggering amount of information—classified and unclassified—that members of Congress receive about the myriad details of the budget. A well-established infrastructure exists to help members of Congress make informed decisions about defense programs and policies. This includes skilled and experienced congressional staffs, government agencies such as the General Accounting Office and the Office of Technology Assessment, think tanks and policy groups, direct military-congressional liaisons, and an extensive, highly focused press and trade literature.

Armed with this information, Congress reflects its will with respect to defense spending in the changes it makes to the budget. Adams argues that despite these changes, there is more consensus between Congress and the Defense Department than not: “Despite the tensions over such changes through most of the past 45 years, the budgetary disagreements and discussions... have focused on program details and not fundamental differences about the roles and missions of the military.” The result, according to Adams, is stability.

The transferability of this experience to other countries is less than clear. The U.S. does not have a parliamentary form of government, making consensus-
building necessary and reinforcing the tendency toward compromise. The U.S. is highly "transparent," i.e., open with respect to the disclosure of government information. Finally, the U.S. has constitutionally mandated congressional participation in the budget process. Of these, Adams says, American attitudes about information sharing and compromise are the most likely to transfer to other countries. It is not clear, however, how and why he feels that these can be transferred to democratizing states such as many in the CIS.

Secrecy has been a virtual societal norm in Russia, even before the Soviet period. How Adams expects former Soviet military leaders, steeped in the tradition of military secrecy, to provide increasing amounts of sensitive military data to parliamentary leaders is not spelled out. Newly acquired regional autonomy among member states of the CIS risks placing sectional interests over national interests, reducing the likelihood of compromise. In the U.S., members of Congress similarly promote and defend the political, social and economic interests of the district or state they represent, often at the expense of the best national policy, but Adams does not explain how these parochial or sectional interests ultimately are subordinated to the national interest, an important process that must be transferred to the former Soviet Union if it is to learn the art of compromise.

Overall this is an important and worthwhile report. It clearly identifies how the U.S. system works and its implications for other emerging democracies. That Adams does not offer suggestions for resolving the problems of transferring this working system, particularly in terms of information accessibility and consensus building, should not be seen as a flaw in his argument. Instead, it should serve as the starting point for overcoming some of the many obstacles facing the democratization of the former Soviet Union.

ROBERT S. HOPKINS, III
University of Virginia


In Restructuring the Soviet Economic Bureaucracy, Paul R. Gregory presents the results of his research on the Soviet mid-level apparatus. His principal sources were personal interviews he conducted with numerous representatives of the bureaucracy who emigrated to the United States in the early and mid-1980s. The author does not provide overall conclusions about why the Soviet economy failed, nor does he attempt to put forward sweeping solutions to the economic crisis of the Soviet Union or its successor states. Rather, Gregory focuses specifically on the manner in which Soviet economic bureaucrats function, pointing out problems, and explaining motives for the bureaucrats’ often destructive behavior. Despite a dry presentation, the book contains valuable insights and information, and should prove useful to understanding the current period of change and economic opportunity in the former Soviet republics.
The mid-level Soviet economic bureaucracy has not disappeared with the downfall of communism and the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and continues to function in much the same manner as it did under the old regime. With this book, Gregory endeavors to characterize the functions and processes of the economic bureaucracy. In so doing, he examines its organizational structure and design, as well as bureaucratic behavior patterns which affect its functions. Despite an economic system which differs from those functioning in the West, Gregory finds many familiar bureaucratic behavior patterns.

In analyzing the Soviet economic bureaucracy, Gregory divides all Soviet bureaucrats into three categories: high level decision makers such as members of the Council of Ministers; those who assist in these decisions such as planning commissions; and those responsible for implementation and output, such as industrial ministries or local parties. Gregory states that only the final category of bureaucrat was required to provide results. This lack of direct responsibility caused difficulty in measuring output and consequently dictated an incentive system based on intangibles.

In analyzing Soviet bureaucratic behavior, Gregory finds problems with the “principal-agent” relationship. He describes the principal-agent framework as a situation in which subordinate members of the bureaucracy act as agents for their superiors. However, agents often behaved in their own interests, rather than those of the principal. He argues that a principal must utilize a “reward system that motivated the agent to voluntarily act in the principal’s interests.” (p.17) Gregory explores all of the bureaucracy’s functions in light of the problems of opportunistic behaviors and an incentive system based on intangibles.

Gregory’s examination of the bureaucracy found a surprisingly widespread interdependence among the various bureaucrats and their agencies. Bureaucrats—particularly those who were responsible for their work—cultivated personal relationships (“networks” in the West) to facilitate their work. As an example of this system, Gregory cites supply allocation, which, though ostensibly centrally planned, he describes as a “complex bargaining process in which the participants seek to strike the best deal possible.” (p.81)

Disappointingly, the book does not discuss restructuring of economic reform until the last chapter, nor does the author offer any advice. However, at the time of the book’s writing, the Soviet Union still existed, and economic reform extended only as far as perestroika. Gregory does criticize perestroika for not addressing key issues such as pricing, and also notes that the economic bureaucracy was likely to resist reforms, as has been demonstrated by repeated attempts at circumventing or reforming the bureaucracy.

Paul Gregory has authored several books dealing with Soviet and socialist planned economies, thus he is familiar with the subject. His research material for this book derives from published Western and Soviet literature, as well as the interviews which he conducted with members of the Soviet middle bureaucracy.

Unfortunately, references to the interviews Gregory conducted are tantalizingly vague, and he relies more heavily on the published documentation for specific examples of bureaucratic behavior. Mr. Gregory notes that concerns for the welfare of respondents’ families who may have remained in the Soviet Union motivated him to make confidentiality one of the criteria of his research. We are thus denied a wealth of information and anecdotes that would make this work
The dissolution of the Soviet Union and the formation of sovereign independent states in its place would seem to make it impossible for a centralized bureaucratic control system to exist. Despite this fact, the basic economic structure and culture of the separate states are rooted in the planned economy, with division of labor and specialization giving monopolies on various essential production functions to widely diverse areas and states. Supply systems have broken down, leaving many portions of the economy without the raw materials to produce what is needed to survive. In many places, it is unclear who holds responsibility and decision making power. In this situation, knowledge of the previous system may help to facilitate operation in and movement toward a new system. As is evident from Gregory’s research, a complete reformation of the bureaucracy is necessary to facilitate independent economic decision making and growth. Although we may hope Gregory’s research soon becomes obsolete, the bureaucracy’s proven resistance to change is likely to provide a long battle. In the interim, Gregory’s conclusions on bureaucratic behaviors in the former Soviet economic bureaucracy and other functions of the mid-level bureaucracy remain pertinent.

Amy M. Willsey
*Adventist Development and Relief Agency*


Georgi Arbatov has been the head of the Institute for the Study of the USA and Canada since it was founded in 1967 and has been an advisor of some sort to every Soviet leader since Khroushchev. One would expect the political memoirs of such an insider to be an exciting and stimulating read, perhaps with historical significance.

Unfortunately, *The System* falls short of those expectations. Throughout his book Mr. Arbatov portrays himself as an underground democrat and a “within the System” reformer who could only truly express himself after the advent of glasnost. He calls his think tank an “oasis of open thinking” which was generally independent of the Soviet government.

Anyone familiar with Arbatov’s previous writings, however, knows that he was a staunch supporter of the ideology and system he claims to have been secretly trying to reform for the past thirty years. His think tank was more a KGB enclave and a source of propaganda than an oasis of open thinking.

Even more disappointing is the fact that while reading Arbatov, one gets the impression that he was more of an outsider than an insider in Soviet politics. He leaves out descriptions and analyses of major events, such as the Cuban missile crisis, as if he was not involved in them at all. This “insider” learned of the missile deployments and events such as the invasion of Afghanistan not from Kremlin leaders, but from Soviet radio and Western media.

*The System*, however, is not entirely without merit. Arbatov does seem to have
had a close relationship with Yuri Andropov, and he includes some intimate information about the longest-reigning KGB chairman and Soviet leader including comical poems he and Andropov exchanged. We also learn from Arbatov that Brezhnev's favorite reading material was Circus, "an obscure magazine that detailed the lives of circus performers, listed programs and appearances, etc."

In his later years, Arbatov suggests, Brezhnev suffered from Alzheimer's disease. These insights aside, Arbatov offers nothing new, and certainly nothing of historical significance. The System appears to be just another work by a Communist chameleon trying to find a place in the postcommunist world.

Kelly E. Adams
Harvard University


At first glance, the relevance of this analytical history seems to have been overtaken by events. However, it is helpful toward understanding the entrenched bureaucracy that plagues reformers today throughout the former Soviet Union. Author Kenneth C. Farmer, chairman of the Political Science Department at Marquette University, draws on his extensive database of more than 1500 current and former members of the Soviet administrative elite, providing valuable personal details that shed light on the murky workings of the apparat. Atop this is applied a heavy structural-anthropological theoretical approach, with frequent references to de Tocqueville. A hole in an otherwise tightly woven and thoroughly documented work is the erroneous blanket statement that "all" evidence indicates that Gorbachev owed nothing to the KGB in taking power. This contradicts the fundamental role KGB Chairman Yuri Andropov played in bringing him to Moscow and positioning him on the Politburo, as Dmitry Mikheyev documents below in The Rise and Fall of Gorbachev.

The most useful section is the last chapter, concerning reforms under Gorbachev, in which the breakup of horizontal patronage bonds and creation of vertical ones closer to the centers of power drove reforms more quickly and comprehensively. Written after the August 1991 putsch but before the collapse of the USSR, the book concludes that free elections are critical to dismantling the self-perpetuating personnel selection system. A system which allows natural leaders to rise, Farmer argues, naturally encourages excellence. The bureaucratic system of an artificial elite, driven by cronyism instead of competition, produced the near criminal mismanagement class that squandered the multinational state's bountiful human and natural resources.

In the author's words, "There are no natural strategic elites in the USSR, nor because there are no talented, creative, and principled figures in various sectors—manifestly, there are—but because those that exist are not permitted to exercise moral, spiritual and cultural leadership." The Soviet bureaucracy produced not an aristocracy, "but nearly a kakistocracy—rule by the worst."

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If Farmer’s theory is correct, recovery from kakistocracy is only a matter of time
as long as political freedoms remain. But, he cautions, all of Russia’s reforms for better or for worse since the time of Peter the Great have been “forced on a reluctant and recalcitrant people by a determined ruler who has chosen a single goal . . . funneled all of the society’s resources into the project, and allowed the chips to fall where they may.”

J. Michael Waller
International Freedom Foundation


One of the shortest but most insightful biographies of the man whose policies inadvertently brought the collapse of the Soviet Union, *The Rise and Fall of Gorbachev* takes a coolly realistic approach to the former Soviet leader’s motivations behind perestroika and glasnost. Dmitry Mikheyev, a physicist and political prisoner who served time in forced labor camps until his expulsion from the USSR in 1979, raises questions about Western Sovietology, which he argue

“offers little help in solving the puzzle of Gorbachev.” In trying to solve that puzzle, Mikheyev is critical of what he classifies as four basic approaches to the study of the Soviet system and political actors in general, scoring each school for a “propensity to focus on one element of political behavior” at the expense of others. He offers a new approach, arguing that “a person’s basic mentality, political mentality, personality, and ethical system are reflected in the operational style of the political actor.”

Mikheyev examines the forces that influenced Gorbachev’s worldview, including the dramatic and violent events of his childhood, his early institutional allegiances and sponsors in the Party and the university, the early stages of his political career and other factors that caused veteran Politburo member Andrei Gromyko to introduce him as a man with “a nice smile, but iron teeth.”

In questioning Gorbachev’s intent behind perestroika, the author argues, “the ultimate test of our hypothesis would be . . . in Gorbachev’s policies toward the KGB. If Gorbachev had no burden of allegiance to the KGB and was determined to reform the system, the KGB would have been a logical place to start democratization and liberalization . . . Instead, the exact opposite occurred.” One of the reasons that Gorbachev kept the KGB off-limits to reform under perestroika, as Mikheyev extensively documents in the first and last chapters, is his heavy dependency on the organization since his university days, if not before.

Drawing on other biographies and filling in the gaps, Mikheyev traces the indecisiveness of Gorbachev as chief of the USSR and retrograde shifts in policy from 1988 in what is almost as much a psychological profile as it is a modern political history. *The Rise and Fall of Gorbachev* is refreshing in its dispassionate approach toward a major historical figure who is as admired and feted abroad as he is reviled and ignored at home. It slices through the willful ignorance and fuzzy sentimentality of Gorbymania in a clinical dissection of a personality who
is convincingly portrayed as somewhat less than the complex and enlightened caricature to which the West has become accustomed.

J.M.W.


One need not be a specialist in the nationalities of the former USSR to appreciate and enjoy this book by journalist Marat Akhurin, a Tatar born and raised in Uzbekistan who drove, walked and flew about Russia, Central Asia and Azerbaijan in the waning months of the Soviet Union in 1990. In Red Odyssey, a highly personal account of his adventure, Akhurin introduces the reader to the lives of everyday people in a lively, colorful narrative which intertwines the region’s rich ancient lore with the absurdities and hardships of the Soviet system and the ubiquitous symptoms of its collapse.

The book begins with the legend of the mother of Genghis Khan, and follows with the author’s creaky trek into lands and peoples torn apart by the empire built upon Leninism: the “ecological genocide” of the Aral Sea, the radioactive wasteland of Semipalatinsk, and the “criminal youth gangs” of the Volga Basin. Vivid anecdotes of his journey are recounted with the dry wit that flourished despite—or perhaps because of—decades of one-party rule:

“The first thing we saw of Khrom-Tau, towering above the town was a gigantic ferris wheel. ‘What do you think, Vova, shall we give it a try?’

“‘But it’s not working,’ Liberman said with certainty. ‘It was either not completely put together or not carefully dismantled.’

“‘Like socialism’, I said.”

Red Odyssey is an intimate look at the most human dimensions of the many nationalities of the former Soviet Union. Unlike almost any other book on the subject, it will be found just as informative to the amateur as to the expert. What makes it even more distinctive is that it is probably the only book on “Soviet” nationalities that makes great reading at the beach.

J.M.W.
Letters and Commentary

Edited by Deborah Alto

The articles in Demokratizatsiya reflect the views of their authors, and do not necessarily correspond with the views of the editors or staff of the journal. We welcome letters from our readers on any subject as well as commentary on topics of concern which do not necessarily relate to articles previously published here. Material submitted is subject to normal editing practices.

ON DEMOKRATIZATSIYA

Congratulations on issue one of your journal. I cannot think of a more important idea than nurturing the concept of democracy and I wish you great success with this venture.

MARY MORGAN SPRINGER
Alexandria, VA

The dawn of democracy in the new countries that emerged from the ashes of the Soviet Union should be studied in-depth by all peoples concerned with world peace and civilization. Certainly in the Czech Republic the memories of the 1968 Soviet-led invasion that postponed the advent of freedom have embittered many people from studying the consequences of the democratizing trends begun by Mikhail Gorbachev and the ensuing dash to freedom by the new republics—a process many believe had its origins in the Prague Spring itself. So even though we are quite concerned with studying the West—understandably—as much as possible, I would also encourage the dissemination of this great publication and this great idea of yours in the Czech Republic as well, because we have much to teach and certainly much to learn from our eastern neighbors.

I very much look forward to the special Demokratizatsiya issue on advice to Presidents William Clinton and Boris Yeltsin and I congratulate you on this most important project. Please keep me subscribed to this most splendid journal.

Jiří Hájek
Chairman, Czech Helsinki Committee
[Co-Founder, Charter 77 and foreign minister of Czechoslovakia, 1968]
Prague, Czech Republic

Yours is an admirable new publishing venture, my congratulations for the initiative! I was particularly fascinated by the Yuri Shchekochikhin interview and commentary on Gorbachev [in issue I].

Aside from the consequences for the international system of the disorganization and discrediting of Soviet power, and the implications for political theory of the
LETTERS AND COMMENTARY

Soviet experience, I think the questions that most interest me are the prospects for growth of a civic culture that might support a liberal political economy, and the approaches to regional autonomy and integration that might have a chance at establishing some equilibrium between effectiveness and national sensibility.

So your publication is right on the mark from my perspective, and I plan to be an avid reader.

DAVID D. FINLEY
Colorado Springs, CO

I enjoyed issue one of *Demokratizatsiya* from front to back. I don't want to miss a single issue. Thanks!!!

JOSÉ E. BERNAL
Aguadilla, Puerto Rico