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1989: The Struggle to Create Post-Cold War Europe (review)

Sarah B. Snyder

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sionary. A visionary he certainly was, but he was also a politician, and his visions were too often distorted by political contingencies. Brown allows this sort of political maneuverability for Boris Yeltsin—who is portrayed as a quintessential opportunist—but not for Gorbachev.

Finally, in tackling the consequences of Communism, Brown does not analyze certain systemic features that actually survived the end of Communism, continuities that are easily identifiable in today's Russia. These continuities can be readily linked to the practices of the past, whether it be the institution of *nomenklatura*, the relationship between the “party” and the “state” (with “United Russia” comfortably stepping into the larger shoes of the Soviet Communist Party), the role of the Federal Security Service and other “power ministries,” or the importance of *blat* (connections, string-pulling) in daily life. How much of this is the legacy of Communism, and how much was Communism shaped by these deeper “systemic” qualities of a specifically Russian mode of governance? Unfortunately, the book provides no answers.

However, no book can answer all the questions. Archie Brown's book has its shortcomings, but overall it is a terrific piece of work, a gem of scholarship certain to shape views of many a brave reader willing to plunge into its stimulating depths.



Mary Elise Sarotte, *1989: The Struggle to Create Post–Cold War Europe*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009. 344 pp. \$29.95.

Reviewed by Sarah B. Snyder, University College London

Although previous books have examined the international diplomacy that led to German unification and the development of a new structure for post–Cold War Europe, Mary Sarotte's work will heretofore become the standard text. Her highly engaging, well-paced account heightens the reader's attention by making the high stakes of the negotiations clear, humanizing her principal actors, and capturing the mood and intrigue of the diplomacy. In addition, her book is the product of impressive archival research in France, Germany, Poland, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States, as well as interviews with numerous key actors. Conceptually, Sarotte's book is one of the first to treat 1989 not as an endpoint in international relations but as a beginning. Another recent example is Jeffrey A. Engel's excellent edited collection, *The Fall of the Berlin Wall: The Revolutionary Legacy of 1989* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009). Although her account largely leaves the causes and dynamics of the 1989 revolutions aside, she makes important contributions to the debate over the end of the Cold War, arguing that the opening of the Berlin Wall was highly contingent, that the United States was not the dominant player in these events, and that the changes in 1989–1990 have lasting significance for Europe and transatlantic relations.

After the Berlin Wall is breached in the first chapter, Sarotte focuses her attention, as key leaders at the time did, on the debates regarding construction of a European structure in the aftermath of the Cold War. She effectively evokes the intense

uncertainty during 1989 about the shape intra-European relations would take, employing architectural terminology to explore the various models considered. She explains the four proposed models and why, given considerable time and political constraints, the “prefab model” of “taking the West’s prefabricated institutions, both for domestic order and international economic and military cooperation, and simply extending them eastward” (p. 8) emerged as the consensus choice among Western leaders in mid-1990. In Sarotte’s view, the “prefab model” promoted stability but was not the best choice because it led to continuing tension in Europe. For example, she addresses Russia’s current, awkward relationship with the West, suggesting it was perpetuated by the decisions made in 1989 and 1990 when an opportunity for cooperation with Russia existed and was lost. Sarotte is not alone in suggesting that decisions made, worldviews developed, and analyses written in 1989 have important significance today. But, whereas many of the other books published in the fall of 2009 to coincide with the twentieth anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall examine U.S. conceptions of the end of the Cold War for their influence on the United States invasion of Iraq—for example, the essays by Jeffrey A. Engel and by Melvyn P. Leffler in Engel, ed., *The Fall of the Berlin Wall*; and Michael Meyer, *The Year That Changed the World: The Untold Story behind the Fall of the Berlin Wall* (New York: Scribner, 2009)—Sarotte keeps her focus firmly on Europe.

Given her forward-looking approach, Sarotte devotes far more attention than other recent studies of 1989 to how the unanticipated opening of the Berlin Wall caught policymakers unprepared to confront German unification and a post-Cold War Europe. One of the many strengths of her account is the way she demonstrates how the backgrounds of the key actors, particularly their experiences during World War Two, influenced their attitudes toward possible German unification. Sarotte sees considerable European agency, arguing that the United States, and therefore the Soviet Union as well, “stepped back” from events. Although the George H. W. Bush administration receives credit for helping to shape events, Sarotte’s account unfortunately reduces Mikhail Gorbachev and other Soviet leaders to rather reactionary roles. Later, she becomes increasingly critical of Gorbachev’s conduct of Soviet diplomacy, describing at one point his “penchant for indecision and procrastination” (p. 101). Even as Sarotte disparages Gorbachev’s performance, her account makes clear how concerned Western leaders such as Helmut Kohl and Bush were about ensuring that the Soviet leader remained in power.

By keeping the focus on German agency, her book fits into a growing body of literature seeking to move attention away from Moscow and Washington and refocus it on Central Europe, with other examples including Victor Sebestyen, *Revolution 1989: The Fall of the Soviet Empire* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2009); and Constantine Pleshakov, *There Is No Freedom without Bread! 1989 and the Civil War That Brought Down Communism* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2009). Her attention to Kohl, Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany, however, is refreshing, and her argument that he was a “savvy politician” (p. 63) who played a central role is convincing. In Sarotte’s analysis, Kohl drove the pace and content of discussions about German unification. At the same time, Sarotte does not wholly neglect lower-level actors.

She highlights the influence of grassroots activists in convincing Kohl that unity should and could be his goal. She also emphasizes French President François Mitterrand's contribution, which has been largely ignored in the English-language literature, apart from Frédéric Bozo's *Mitterrand: The End of the Cold War and German Unification*, trans. by Susan Emmanuel (New York: Berghahn Books, 2009).

Sarotte's book shows that despite the challenges of writing contemporary history, excellent accounts can result. The book also confirms the increasing need for historians to look beyond the Cold War as a chronological endpoint.