

LETTERS

TO THE EDITOR:

Under ordinary circumstances, I should be pleased that our quarterly journal recently reviewed two of my books. The coauthored one about *Soviet Military Policy Since World War II* was discussed competently by Christopher Jones (Spring 1987), a recognized authority on the Warsaw Treaty Organization. The review by David Ost of *USSR Foreign Policies After Detente* (Fall/Winter 1987), however, is biased and inaccurate.

The last three volumes in the AAASS *American Bibliography of Slavic and East European Studies* credit Ost with two journalistic pieces (including a travelogue) and a book review in *Poland Watch*, as well as one article in *The Nation*. All deal with contemporary Polish affairs.

Why then did you apparently consider somebody who has never written about USSR foreign policy qualified to conclude on behalf of *Slavic Review* that my book is “a poor choice for students”? How would Ost know?

He chides me for not attempting to figure out which Kremlin faction supports which policy. The fact is that nobody in the west has any sound basis for such speculation.

Ost, however, goes beyond such ignorance. He impugns the integrity of nonpolitical professionals who prepare “documents of the *Reagan administration's* State Department and intelligence apparatus” (emphasis added) and criticizes me for not raising the “possibility that official United States documents might be examples of disinformation.” This shows not only that the reviewer is innocent of the role that disinformation plays in USSR policy, both foreign and domestic, but also that he is somehow committed to the undemonstrated (and undemonstrable) proposition that lack of affection for the Soviet Union is manufactured by conspiratorial gnomes in the so-called military-industrial complex.

I had come to expect better of *Slavic Review* and request that you publish my letter in your next issue.

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PROFESSOR OST REPLIES:

The only way Staar can defend his book, it seems, is through an *ad hominem* attack upon my character. My review called attention to serious methodological flaws with his book and cited evidence of disingenuousness in the presentation. Staar responds by challenging my credentials—carelessly (e.g. “travelogue”?), but that’s not the point. He doesn’t seem to understand that the problem is with his book, not the pedigree of its reviewer. Or perhaps he really does understand, for although he calls my review “biased and inaccurate,” he makes no attempt to substantiate his charges or refute any of my points. Nor can he.

I chided Staar for refusing to *discuss* internal differences, not for his inability to figure them out. Like many other of his silences, this one is particularly unfortunate in a book aimed for students, who need to be aware at least that there *are* important differences within the Soviet elite. As to the possibility of disinformation in official Reagan administration documents—well, after last year’s admissions by John Poindexter and Elliot Abrams, the point hardly needs belaboring. I myself cited one piece of United States disinformation that Staar, in his book, treated as authentic, and I am pleased that he does not now dispute my contention. The issue is relevant to Staar only because of his *inordinate* reliance on such sources. Why raising these issues makes me an “innocent” on Soviet disinformation or guilty of “affection” for the Soviet Union is a bit of logic I leave to others to figure out.

It is because of the book’s serious flaws that I would not use it in the Soviet foreign policy courses I teach. Staar adds nothing now that would lead me to change my opinion.