vision of judicial authority, one founded on a decent regard for the competing constitutional views of the political branches. This might be a vision of judicial humility for an age of disensus, anchored not in romantic respect for the wisdom of Congress and the president but in respect for their constitutional prerogative to interpret the Constitution in ways that may differ from the Supreme Court. A deliberative Court would generally uphold the acts of the political branches, even when it disagreed with them, unless the president and Congress had violated constitutional rights and limitations that were too clear to ignore. It is not surprising, perhaps, that the Court has managed to avoid a political backlash against its high-handedness by keeping its finger to the political winds. But have the political branches become so cowed by the Court's grandiose assertions of its own supremacy that they have lost the will to stand up for themselves?

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**Kremlinologist as Hero**

**By Stephen Kotkin**

Understanding the Cold War: A Historian’s Personal Reflections by Adam B. Ulam

(Leopolis, 448 pp., $30 paper)

To imagine the intellectual life of the post-war West without the Polish emigration. The Polish impact has been especially immense when it comes to views on Russia. Czeslaw Milosz lectured at Berkeley with uncanny empathy on Dostoevsky. Leszek Kolakowski, the renowned moral philosopher at Oxford and Chicago, entombed Soviet Marxism as well as Western Marxism in his monumental trilogy, and composed an immortal parody of revisionist scholarship on Stalinism (for the pages of Survey, edited by Leo Labeled, Andrzej Walicki of Notre Dame struck brilliant portraits of Russian populism and the Slavophile-Westernizer divide, and then delivered his own eulogy for the Marxist faith.

And beyond the history of ideas, Zbigniew Brzezinski, the grand strategist and perceptive analyst of the Soviet Bloc, served as National Security Adviser (under Carter), while Richard Pipes, the grand synthesizer of imperial Russian history, also found his way into the National Security Council (under Reagan). The University of Pennsylvania’s Moshe Lewin became the acclaimed village elder among historians of Soviet Russia’s peasant inheritance, monstrous bureaucracy, and the supposed dynamics of the system’s evolution. The itinerant Isaac Deutscher, based eventually in England, achieved biographical mastery over Stalin, ultimately cast out Trotsky as prophet, and talked up Khurschew, until he was banished. And there have been many others, notably Adam Ulam, who died in March in Cambridge, Massachusetts, leaving behind a half century of influential scholarship and punditry, and a posthumous memoir, *Understanding the Cold War.*

Adam Bruno Ulam was born in 1922 in Lwów in Poland, a medieval town that was known as Lemberg under the Habsburgs and would become Lviv under the Soviets. Since 1991, the “City of Lions” has been Lviv in independent Ukraine. Little remains there of the classical education or Old World culture that nurtured the future Cold War historian. In 1939, Adam, who had just graduated high school, and his twenty-nine-year-old brother Stanisław, who had studied at Harvard’s Society of Fellows, home for summer holiday, were scheduled to board ship for New York on September 3. Their perspicacious father, a well-to-do lawyer who was widowed the year before, advised his boys to set sail earlier. So they embarked for New York in mid-August. Hitler invaded Poland on September 1. Sixteen days later, Stalin, by prior secret agreement with Hitler, invaded Poland from the east. By then, Stan had returned to Harvard, and Adam enrolled at Brown, the only entering foreign student, and a Jew. The brothers never saw their father or elder sister again.

Brown, where young Ulam studied European and American history, was not City College with its politicized, immitgrant alcoves. As the Nazis overran France, began bombing Britain, and then drove deep into the Soviet Union, the gaiety of fraternity life and the “America First” detachment of 1939-1941 was almost too much to bear for a Polish student from occupied Europe. Finally Pearl Harbor broke the isolationist spell. Ulam obtained immigration papers and reported to the United States draft board, only to be rejected for having “relatives living in enemy territory!” In 1943, upon graduating, the tall, strapping youth was summoned for a physical, but he was turned away again, this time for near-sightedness. Unlike other eager call-ups, he had forgotten to wear contacts.

Following his elder brother (and surrogate father) to the University of Wisconsin, Adam got a job as an army instructor for Russian, the unfamiliar language of our wartime ally. The other teachers included an ex-czarist general, a former baronet, and a Moscow-trained Polish violinist with whom Adam shared an apartment. The roommates befriended a retired professor of Byzantine history, Alexander Vasilev, who had known Tchaikovsky in St. Petersburg, and in Madison helped them to order spaghetti and meatballs in Italian. In such company, Adam acquired a fondness for Russian culture rather than the more typical Russophobia of the émigré Pole born of centuries under the Russian boot. The army privates and non-coms whom Ulam had taught to speak Russian were assigned to the Pacific Theater.

Stanisław Ulam had disappeared (to New Mexico, it turned out, to work on the bomb), and after the long anticipated victory Poland disappeared, too, behind the Iron Curtain. Adam, meanwhile, had enrolled in Harvard’s Government Department for graduate study. Two of his teachers at Brown had studied at Harvard, and Ulam writes that they imparted “an historical approach to modern politics enlarged by philosophical analysis and political and economic considerations”—a description of what would become his own winning method, now quantifiably out of fashion. He wrote a dissertation on English socialism, and also studied with Merle Fainsod, the dean of Soviet analysts, whose twelve o’clock lectures in a basement classroom in the Fogg Museum were affectionately known as “Darkness at Noon.”

At Ulam’s first Harvard residence, Claverly Hall, the janitor sported a derby hat and pince-nez, and reminisced about former student residents, such as Franklin D. Roosevelt. Later Ulam swapped places with a young scholar named McGeorge Bundy and moved to Eliot House. The housemaster at his new abode, John
Finley, a professor of Greek, brought the university's most renowned faculty to the mess hall and social gatherings, and knew by name his entire student "flock," not just the European counts and princes. Ulam boarded with the son of James Joyce, the grandson of Matisse, the younger son of the Aga Khan, and a descendant of Indonesian rajas who told him his family had been in politics for 800 years. "And what did they do before?" Ulam recalls having asked.

In these mandarin alcoves of the new, American-dominated postwar world, Ulam, in J. Press suits and striped bow ties, came to know officials of Chiang Kai-Shek's Nationalist regime, who had no clue that they were soon to be overthrown, as well as trainees for what would become Mao's regime. Ulam also met Pierre Trudeau, whom he recalls as an aristocratic French-Canadian with "Christian-anarchist" views, as well as the doctoral student in economics Andreas Papandreou. Whatever he did for Greece as prime minister after the downfall of the colonels' dictatorship, Papandreou is said to have been valuable company for obtaining special treatment in Greek-American restaurants, and for navigating Boston nightclubs. Ulam lets slip that in 1945, after the relaxation of gender segregation on campus, a romance blossomed in Widener Library with an unnamed Anglo-Irish representative of the fair sex, leading to dog shows, horse races, and the Boston symphony, but it all "ended tempestuously." In 1947, he received his doctorate and George Marshall gave the commencement address in which he announced his plan for rebuilding Western Europe.

Harvard hired Ulam for the next academic year, and it set up a Russian Research Center, which in the years to come became the academic epicenter of the Cold War. Following Fainsod's death in 1972, Ulam would direct the high-profile center for sixteen of the next twenty years. But he taught his first class, attended by the undergraduate Henry Kissinger, on the British Empire. "Every few months, a piece of my course would, so to speak, fall off," Ulam writes of postwar decolonization. "I decided... to shift to an expanding subject, and to teach about the Soviet Union." Before he retired, in 1992, he would preside pedagogically over that empire's crack-up as well.

Ulam married a Radcliffe graduate, Mary Hamilton Burgwin, in 1963 (they later divorced), had two sons, and wrote nineteen books, one a novel. As he here recounts, he initially devoted himself to examining Marxism's powers of seduction, which he linked not to intelligentsia manipulations but to psychological proclivities arising out of social developments, especially in peasant societies undergoing industrialization. And whereas some celebrated analysts, such as John Maynard Keynes, had dismissed Marxism as "illogical and dull," Ulam highlighted the doctrine's intricacy and comprehensiveness, which, he argued, explained its attraction not just to peasants but also to intellectuals. Ulam also wrote about the Soviet-Yugoslav split in 1948, which just three years after the Chinese revolution, he presented as a harbinger of the fracturing of communism. These two themes—Marxism's spreading influence and its resulting divisions—formed the core of Ulam's work.

Having already ruffled some academic feathers by aptly describing the power struggle after Stalin's death in 1953 as akin to gangland Chicago under Capone, in 1965 Ulam published The Bolsheviks, the most incisive study to date of Lenin and his followers. Ulam's Lenin came across as a cultured Russian gentleman and an heir to a long revolutionary tradition, but also as a fanatic who, when the moment fortuitously arrived, beat the underground party into seizing power at all costs. What Ulam called Lenin's "penchant for terror" he attributed to a "perverse hatred" that the dropout law student felt toward "his own class," the intelligentsia, and to the hanging of his elder brother by the czarist police. Such occasionally strained psychologizing went together with skillful recuperations of seemingly obscure ideological disputations, alleged to have long-term repercussions, and sober details of political repression.

The upshot, a powerful portrait of the Bolshevik leader and the Bolshevik movement written despite the inaccessibility of many documents, burst on the scene after the de-Stalinization of 1956, the launching of Sputnik in 1957, and the Cuban revolution in 1960, all of which had contributed to a sense that the Soviet Union had not simply recovered from World War II but recaptured its revolutionary élan, and might just be the wave of the future. Here Ulam notes that the opening of the secret archives has brought little that was truly unknown about Lenin, unless one counts the proof of his consummation with Inessa Armand. The dictator's "all-engrossing passion for revolution," he writes, had "seemed to preclude the possibility, perhaps the ability, to respond to the temptation of the flesh."

Stalin had succeeded Lenin, and in 1973 Ulam published his acclaimed biography, Stalin: The Man and His Era. At the time the book appeared, the extent of the terror and the Gulag was being minimized by some leading American scholars, while even intellectuals without leftist sympathies sometimes felt that accepting the full unvarnished truth about the Soviet Union smacked of bad taste, or even McCarthyism. Ulam piled up the sorted details of Stalin's reign, and against the post-Khruschev interpretive trend, he argued that the tyrant represented not a perversion or a usurpation of Leninism but rather its "defining characteristic." To his critics, who noted the utter absence of society in his great-man histories, Ulam countered, as he recalls that, "the most practical and important approach to the study of the Soviet Union was through its politics, which in its turn had to be an inquiry into what was going on in the political leadership." Dubbed Sovietology or sometimes Kremlinology, this endeavor at its best entailed voracious reading of official sources, often between the lines, frequent resort to the accounts of defectors, and inventive guesswork.
So much about the Stalin years seemed to defy logic, such as the accusations of mass spying and wrecking throughout the Soviet elite during the Great Terror. Ulam surmised that in the conspiratorial atmosphere of the 1930s, most people, mentally equipped with little more than the official ideology, probably believed the preposterous charges that resulted in millions of arrests. "Working on Stalin, as I suppose on Hitler," he confesses, "is not a pleasant job. One cannot help becoming depressed by recounting the stories of human depravity and mass suffering." Ulam admits, however, having "found occasional distraction in trying to solve the intriguing historical puzzles of the period," mysteries "that would challenge the ingenuity of Agatha Christie's Hercule Poirot.

The archives, still not fully revealed, overwhelmingly confirm Stalin's responsibility for the massacres as well as the system's inhumanity, with copious new details; but the secret documents offer few new insights into Ulam's larger questions of the bases of mass participation and the adherence to socialism despite knowledge or even direct experience of the pervasive bloodletting.

Ulam applied his feel for Communist personalities and paradoxes to the mysteries of international behavior of the Soviet Union as well. In such works as the instant classic Expansion and Coexistence (1968, 1974), as well as The Rivals (1971) and Dangerous Relations (1983), he wondered whether the Soviet leadership could achieve a lasting détente with the West, or required a permanent siege mentality for domestic purposes—a potentially shattering proposition in the nuclear age. Hawkish specialist-officials such as Brzezinski and Pipes largely dismissed any possibility of lessening hair-trigger tensions, arguing that the Soviet system could never change, while some left-leaning scholars such as Deutscher and Lewin foresaw a relaxation both feeding and growing out of a Soviet domestic liberalization. Inclined neither to bring on doomsday nor to pursue the chimera of socialism with a human face, Ulam hinted that the Soviet regime was beset by the contradictions of its expansionist successes, and might become more accommodating abroad even as it remained authoritarian at home. That is more or less what happened, until Gorbachev arrived to expose the incurable as it remained authoritarian at home.

Perhaps no subject exercised the lifelong student of European political systems and international affairs more than the American university, which Ulam had known since his years at Brown. Writing of the 1960s, Vietnam, and the student protests, he recalls encountering on his way to class "morning scenes of a sizeable crowd sometimes filling the large space in front of the library and an orator with a microphone denouncing violently some special iniquity of the university and/or of the bourgeois world." He pronounces the issues (or some of them) legitimate, but the methods not. The smugness that "Harvard was not Columbia" ended with the takeover and the forcible clearing of the administration building. Ulam admonishes that the "university in a democratic country is not the proper place for political struggle," while also judging the faculty's behavior at the time as "un-heroic.

Lecturing to Harvard students on socialism and revolution, Ulam had to be dragged to the suddenly recurring faculty meetings, which he likens to a "rowdy Balkan parliament" of "scholarly men... largely without prior interest in politics, split up into combating factions." Of the phenomenal post-1960s growth in academic administrators, he concludes sarcastically that "a great proliferation of bureaucracy follows every revolution, and Harvard was no exception." In 1972, Ulam published The Fall of the American University, in which he decried the "governmentalization and politicization" of the American academy, though he would continue to prosper at an American university for several more decades. He also became captivated by Russia's tumultuous 1860s and 1870s, writing In the Name of the People (1977) about the radical revolutionary mystique, the bomb throwing, and the assassination plots.

Cursed to live in interesting times, the exile from bygone Lwów came to know three American presidents, but mostly kept his distance from Washington. The academic conference circuit was not his cup of tea either. He never returned to his birthplace in what he playfully liked to call "Ukrainian-occupied Poland," and he avoided all travel to the Soviet Union, when it became possible after 1957, except for one short trip in fall 1985, preferring to receive important contacts along with students at the Russian Research Center (known since 1997 as the Davis Center). Ulam's tidied-up reminiscences are interspersed with warm recollections from his brother (who died in 1984), his ex-wife (the book's publisher), his sons, colleagues, former students, and old family friends. A zestful storyteller, Ulam favors the winning anecdote and the wink and nod over the tedium of score-settling. His tales of clubby academic practices and upheavals amid the Ivy alternate with ponderous exegeses of ever-receding Cold War controversies and brief mentions of out of place characters, such as Heinrich Brüning, the German chancellor who gave way, eventually, to Hitler and also found a home at Harvard.