

Failed Illusions: Moscow, Washington, Budapest, and the 1956 Hungarian Revolt (Cold War International History Project)

By Charles Gati

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Winner of the 2007 Marshall Shulman Prize

The 1956 Hungarian revolution, and its suppression by the U.S.S.R., was a key event in the cold war, demonstrating deep dissatisfaction with both the communist system and old-fashioned Soviet imperialism. But now, fifty years later, the simplicity of this David and Goliath story should be revisited, according to Charles Gati's new history of the revolt.

Denying neither Hungarian heroism nor Soviet brutality, *Failed Illusions* nevertheless modifies our picture of what happened. Imre Nagy, a reform communist who headed the revolutionary government and turned into a genuine patriot, could not rise to the occasion by steering a realistic course between his people's demands and Soviet geopolitical and ideological interests. The United States was all talk, no action, while Radio Free Europe simultaneously backed the insurgents' unrealizable demands and opposed Nagy. In the end, the Soviet Union followed its imperial impulse instead of seeking a political solution to the crisis in the spirit of de-Stalinization.

Failed Illusions is based on extensive archival research, including the CIA's operational files, and hundreds of interviews with participants in Budapest, Moscow, and Washington. Personal observations by the author, a young reporter in Budapest in 1956, bring the tragic story vividly to life.

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Editorial Review

Review

"Gati's book towers high above the rest as by far the best book published on 1956... his work aims to examine what happened and to point to what could have happened given the other complex factors that were in play in 1956. The fruit of Gati's effort is an engaging, fascinating, and well-written narrative coupled wit masterful historical and political analysis."—*Slavic Review*
"This important work deepens our knowledge of events through scores of new documentary findings, filling in fascinating details about events, decisions, and key players' personal philosophies and points of view. It's the only book of its kind."—Malcolm Byrne, Deputy Director and Director of Research, National Security Archive"Gati draws on a wealth of archival evidence and personal interviews to produce a remarkably readable and provocative essay, rich in astute observations and illuminating anecdotes, and leavened by fragments of his personal and intellectual history."—*International History Review*

"Gati draws on reams of new research and documentary evidence from Hungary, while ferreting out scores of fascinating documents from the U.S. archives. Specialists on this subject will benefit immensely from this work, but the book is written in such an engaging manner that it will also appeal to a more general audience."—Mark Kramer, Director of Cold War Studies, Harvard University

"*Failed Illusions* casts incisively a new perspective on three key dimensions of the historic drama that was the Hungarian Revolution: the unsavory background and the heroic epiphany of Imre Nagy, the revolution's tragic leader; the confused, disruptive, and ultimately devious Soviet efforts to manipulate the Hungarian communists; and the impotent futility of US posturing which masqueraded as 'the policy of liberation.' Riveting as a story, significant as a history."—Zbigniew Brzezinski, former U.S. National Security Advisor, author of *The Soviet Bloc: Unity and Conflict*
"Gati's book is eminently worth reading. Whether or not one agrees with his views and conclusions, it is a most valuable contribution to the scholarly literature on the subject."—*Russian Review*

"The main message on U.S. foreign policy in Gati's book resonates with me. We're forever spouting bullshit in foreign policy for domestic political reasons at great costs to people abroad, who take the bullshit seriously."—Leslie Gelb, President Emeritus, Council on Foreign Relations and former foreign-affairs columnist, *New York Times*

"Born and raised in Hungary, Gati...was a young journalist in Budapest at the time. Using hundreds of documents in the archives in Budapest, Moscow, and Washington, he has written a thorough and scholarly analysis of the revolution."—*Library Journal*
"Reading *Failed Illusions* is like reading a John le Carre novel with documentation. Charles Gati provides a suspenseful inside look into the types of issues and characters le Carre has portrayed in his novels yet Gati's story is all too real and tragic." —Stephen F. Szabo, Johns Hopkins University
"...*Failed Illusions* is a brilliant exercise in the counterfactual, a catalog of the "what ifs" that should be considered when thinking about the creation and perpetuation of the Soviet bloc."—*The Moscow Times*

"*Failed Illusions* sheds new light on American policy, especially the controversial role of Radio Free Europe as it encouraged the rebels....[and] Mr. Gati's excellent footnotes, several quite personal and poignant, give added depth to the story."—*The Economist*
"Charles Gati's *Failed Illusions* is a searching, scholarly account of the political calculations of the Kremlin, the White House, and the Hungarian Communist leadership."—*New York Times Book Review*"This book is a multilayered treatement of complex quetions in the history of the United State, the USSR, Hungary, the Cold War, and international realtions in general, and it will set the direction of discussion for a long time to come."—*American Historical Review*
"The product of more than 15 years of extraordinary research and interviewing, much of it in Hungarian, his book highlights just how much we have to learn about key Cold War events and, more important, how we should go about learning it."—*Foreign Affairs*
"Charles Gati's Failed Illusions is an outstanding work."—London Review of Books
"The '56-anniversary book that's gotten the most press is Charles Gati's Failed Illusions, which, in meticulous scholarly detail, fortifies the new, more depressing argument for why America didn't ride to the rescue with either military might or aggressive diplomacy."—BOOKFORUM
"Gati has undertaken an important, brilliant reappraisal of the 1956 Hungarian uprising and its subsequent violent suppression. Scholars of the Cold War, Hungarian history, and anyone interested in the popular revolution will be spellbound by this book."—CHOICE
"Charles Gatis Failed Illusions gives a comprehensive account of the Revolution in succinct and elegant prose along with his own analysis and some speculation."—New York Review of Books
"The main message on U.S. foreign policy in Gati's book resonates with me. We're forever spouting bullshit in foreign policy for domestic political reasons at great costs to people abroad, who take the bullshit seriously."
—Leslie Gelb, President Emeritus, Council on Foreign Relations and former foreign-affairs columnist, New York Times
"Riveting as a story, significant as a history." —Zbigniew Brzezinski
"Gati proposes a more realistic and critical analysis of the uprising than has been presented before...Gati has written an imminently readable book. I would recommend this as one of the best histories of the Hungarian uprising of 1956, which combines the best of personal recollection with archival research."
—Canadian Journal of History

From the Author
"Two weeks after Moscow crushed the revolution, I left Hungary, going first to Austria and then in a few weeks to the United States. I became one of some 182,000 refugees from Soviet-dominated Hungary. My parents, though I was their only child, did not discourage me from leaving. They stayed up all night before I left, watching me as I wrote a few notes of farewell to relatives and friends and put a few belongings together for my escape from uncertainty to uncertainty. Emerging from the kitchen, my mother came around to stuff her freshly baked sweets--the best in the world--into my small backpack. "Look up Uncle Sanyi in New York," she said. At dawn, when it was time to say goodbye, my father tried to hold back his tears but he could not. "Write often," he said, his voice quavering with emotion. We embraced. We kissed. As I left, they stood on the small balcony of our Barcsay Street apartment and waved. I walked backwards as long as I could see them, hoping they could also see me for another few seconds. (As I recall this scene some fifty years later, holding back my tears as my father once tried to do, I still see them waving on the balcony, and I always will.)
I did not fully appreciate until much later--when I had my own children in America--how unselfish my parents were to let go of me."

From the Inside Flap

The 1956 Hungarian revolution, and its suppression by the U.S.S.R., was a key event in the cold war,

demonstrating deep dissatisfaction with both the communist system and old-fashioned Soviet imperialism. But now, fifty years later, the simplicity of this David and Goliath story should be revisited, according to Charles Gati's new history of the revolt.
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Users Review

From reader reviews:

James Pierce:

The feeling that you get from Failed Illusions: Moscow, Washington, Budapest, and the 1956 Hungarian Revolt (Cold War International History Project) is a more deep you searching the information that hide inside the words the more you get enthusiastic about reading it. It does not mean that this book is hard to know but Failed Illusions: Moscow, Washington, Budapest, and the 1956 Hungarian Revolt (Cold War International History Project) giving you joy feeling of reading. The article writer conveys their point in specific way that can be understood through anyone who read that because the author of this reserve is well-known enough. This kind of book also makes your own vocabulary increase well. That makes it easy to understand then can go with you, both in printed or e-book style are available. We suggest you for having this specific Failed Illusions: Moscow, Washington, Budapest, and the 1956 Hungarian Revolt (Cold War International History Project) instantly.

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