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Adam Zamoyski, *Phantom Terror: Political Paranoia and the Creation of the Modern State, 1789-1848*. New York: Basic Books, 2014. xv + 569 pp. \$ 35.00 U.S. (cl). Maps, notes, bibliography, and index. ISBN 978-0-465-03989-0.

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The title of this engaging book should be enough to alert readers to the powerful presentist inspiration for it. If not, Zamoyski spells it out on the second page. The deeper he delved into the decades after the defeat of Napoleon, the more he realized that the fear of violent revolution and the methods of control and repression that were developed as a result “held enormous relevance to the present” (p. xiv). Zamoyski’s themes, namely the political exploitation of fear, the conjuring of false conspiracies, and the extension of police powers at the expense of individual liberties, fit well with recent efforts to combat international terrorism. Chapter titles such as “War on Terror,” “Suicide Terrorists,” “The Empire of Evil,” and “The Duke of Texas” (a title bestowed on Prince von Metternich of Austria) are obviously inspired by George W. Bush’s presidency. Moreover, Zamoyski writes that “the paladins of revolution ... were fired by a message which some referred to as their ‘Khoran’” (p. 36) and describes how the privately-owned Swiss postal service gave the Austrian police access to “all mail between France, Germany, and Italy” (p. 163), which resembles the relationship between private telephone companies and the National Security Agency in the United States.

Actual acts of terrorism in the past twenty-five years greatly complicate the comparison, however, so that, despite the implied parallel between overly zealous efforts to contain revolutionary contagion in early nineteenth-century Europe and the current struggle against terrorism perpetrated by Islamic extremists, Zamoyski never makes such a comparison.^[1] Rather, when he arrives at his conclusion, many pages later, he argues that “the unnecessary repression of moderate liberal tendencies arrested the natural development of European society” (p. 499). Moreover, this development eventually forced opposition groups to resort to violence, some of it terrorist in form. Thus, the actions of arch conservatives in the first half of the nineteenth century led to “the near-destruction of European civilization” in the first half of the twentieth. Such a teleological assertion avoids making the revolutionary struggle for liberty the equivalent of Islamic extremism—to almost every reader’s relief, no doubt—but at the price of some confusion over what lessons Zamoyski is drawing from his presentist history.

Phantom Terror begins with an idiosyncratic overview of conservative responses to the French Revolution, both ideological (de Maistre, Burke, Barruel and Bonald oblige) and political (the Pilnitz Declaration of 1791, anti-alien and anti-sedition acts in Britain in 1793-94 and the United States in 1798). According to Zamoyski, the resulting growth of police surveillance and state control of individuals far outstripped the actual threat of revolutionary upheaval outside France. Paying no heed to continuities between the repressive techniques of the First French Republic and those of Napoleon preserves old clichés about Joseph Fouché largely inventing political policing. Across the Channel, an alarmist British government overreacted to labor unrest by deploying as many troops against Luddites near Sherwood Forrest as Wellington had in the Peninsula. But it was the Congress of Vienna that really fixed the conservative response. Legitimacy supposedly underpinned the new order. And yet, the

actual settlement of 1814–15 ran roughshod over the rights of many lesser rulers, as well numerous aristocrats. Great power politics clearly trumped traditional arrangements. Zamoyski draws the conclusion that states were being elevated above individuals more than ever before. As a result, the attempt to provide “order” became self-defeating because it gave the modern state the upper hand in European societies, thereby provoking opposition.

Zamoyski is at his most interesting when describing various strands of conservative reaction to the perceived threats of revolutionary liberalism after the Congress of Vienna. Metternich of Austria and Tsar Alexander of Russia took it upon themselves to preserve the new order. Metternich did so by developing a vast network of police agents that stretched across territories in Italy and Germany not even under Austrian rule. This systematic surveillance and repression stymied perfectly “natural” nationalist aspirations in both regions for decades. In Germany, the reactionary Carlsbad Decrees adopted by the German Confederation in 1819 (not 1820) created the infamous Mainz Central Commission to investigate all potential demagogues and revolutionary intriguers. Zamoyski summarizes the results with characteristic verve: “Increasingly hysterical declarations by Metternich” provided the basis for a “calculated counter-revolution cynically fabricating evidence and exploiting people’s fears” (p. 226). Police over-reaching may have prevented liberals from making sovereignty of the people the basis for political legitimacy—new constitutions were essentially banned—but such repression inspired more conspiracies than had ever existed before. Tsar Alexander’s puzzling mix of mysticism, reformism, and authoritarianism provided the inspiration for the Holy Alliance. This too proved counter-productive because by 1820, it had come to stand “in the imagination of most thinking Europeans for an unholy cartel devoted to combating everything that frightened it or threatened its privileges” (pp. 280–81).

Zamoyski provides delightfully dismissive accounts of the various secret societies accused of plotting revolution at the time: Illuminati, Guelphi, Carbonari, etc. At the same time, he acknowledges that events such as Napoleon’s Hundred Days in 1815, the assassination of the Duc de Berry in 1820, and the July Revolution of 1830 provided real inspiration for strong willed conspirators. Just how much difficulty conservative leaders may have had in telling the difference between ineffectual secret societies and dangerous conspiracies is never taken into account. For example, expanding the Austrian police apparatus in Italy in order to stymie revolutionary nationalism is depicted as fundamentally sinister, despite the very real activities of Mazzini and Garibaldi. Zamoyski revels in the apparently absurd frequency with which arch conservatives, especially Metternich and Alexander, blamed agitation in various parts of Europe, be it Belgium or Bavaria, Poland or Portugal, on a supposed revolutionary steering committee in Paris. In the book’s index, “*Comité directeur*: imagined” gets sixteen separate page references. Some of these examples are, indeed, quite ludicrous and evidence of the deep paranoia of contemporaries. They become all the more so when conservatives are depicted as foolishly opposing the march of history, and various risings are stripped of all revolutionary intent and described simply as “reactions against oppression, injustice, corruption and hypocrisy” (p. 389). There is no doubt that the police who served reactionary leaders either imagined, greatly exaggerated, or wholly invented far more conspiracies than actually existed. After all, this is the time-honored means for security services to justify their powers and expense. But it is not enough to explain the revolutions of 1848 as inevitable liberal reactions to conservative reactionaries. More needs to be said about how various strands of liberal nationalism emerged in the first half of the nineteenth century.

Phantom Terror pays much less attention to the threat of revolution than it does to the repression of liberty, but therein lies its originality. More satisfying than Zamoyski’s explanation for the revolutions of 1848, which receive almost no coverage in themselves, is his emphasis on fear as a “social pathology” generated by insecure regimes that sense their own lack of legitimacy. For example, when the British government made a fanciful link between the Chartist reform movement and industrial unrest in 1842, known tellingly as the “Plug Plot,” it led to over 15,000 arrests. The temptation for such regimes to paint opponents in highly moral terms is also duly noted. Hearing about events in Paris in February

1848, Frederick William of Prussia exclaimed, “Satan is on the loose again” (p. 486). Moreover, the arrogance of power fosters delusions of superior insight into the workings of the world. As Metternich put it, he saw “revolution, with its inevitable consequences, disorder, anarchy, and death, where many others only saw enlightenment grappling with prejudice” (p. 276). Such reactions are timeless, and so relevant to the present.

More than teaching lessons from history, however, *Phantom Terror* entertains. Zamoyski is a master stylist who combines an eye for *bons mots* with a gift for incisive phrasing: in Austria, “the police conducted an obsessive pursuit of the trivial” (p. 124); in Paris in July 1830, “French society had been attacked, and it had defended itself.” His work shares the traits of journalism. He relies on the work of academic historians but does not engage their arguments. Frequent hyperbole enlivens the prose without concern that it might be taken literally. In the Papal States, “a double-crossed ‘t’ or an undotted ‘i’ could condemn the traveller to constant surveillance or being moved on” (p. 317). This comes with a certain disregard for factual accuracy as well. When Fouché became the French Minister of Police in 1799, he imposed censorship on theaters and newspapers: “to show that he meant business, transgressors were shot” (p. 83). How ready one is to overlook such ticks depends on how much one wants to enjoy a deeply researched and lively romp through reactionary Europe in the early nineteenth century.

NOTE

[1] When we consider that the French police were somewhat familiar with the men who attacked the offices of *Charlie Hebdo* and a kosher grocery store in Paris in January 2015, we realize that it is harder, though not wrong, to criticize the “pre-emptive justice” applied to the “Lackawana Six” following their arrest in September 2002. The American case illustrates Zamoyski’s themes, especially the willingness of political leaders to foster popular fears of secret conspiracies, whereas the French case embodies the reality of police surveillance that can be both highly intrusive and ineffective at the same time. However, Zamoyski does little to explore the real threat of revolutionary conspiracy in the early nineteenth century.

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