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Reviewed by **Alan P. Dobson**, Saint Andrews University

James L. Gormly makes a solid contribution to a much-neglected topic: the politics and diplomacy of civil aviation. His focus on U.S. policies towards the Soviet Union and later the Soviet Bloc from 1943 to 1960 is a fascinating read with the waxing and waning of hopes in Washington for reciprocal air services with the Soviet Union largely shadowing the progress of the Cold War – its heating up and cooling down. Along the way we learn a considerable amount about the development of U.S. civil aviation policy and how it changed; also how it specifically responded to changes in the Cold War within the context of alliance politics. This article should engage anyone with an interest in civil aviation and/or the development of the Cold War.

Talks between the Soviets and the Americans began formally in Washington in the summer of 1944, only weeks before the Chicago International Civil Aviation Conference on 1 November to 7 December 1944, which aimed at creating a new postwar international civil aviation regime. Explaining how the U.S.-Soviet talks went, or rather did not go, and the following fifteen years of trying to establish direct commercial services is well done. But first, the context set by Gormly needs attention.

Gormly is absolutely right to emphasize the excitement over post-war civil aviation and its perceived importance to the U.S. To many it was seen as comparable in significance to British merchant marine supremacy in the nineteenth century. Repeating Admiral Alfred Thayer Mahan's statement that "land carriage, always restricted and, therefore, always slow, toils enviously but hopelessly behind vainly seeking to replace and supplant the Royal Highway of nature's own making," Grover Loening of the Maritime Commission added that "the Royal Highway [Mahan] was speaking of is the sea. But may he not turn

over in his grave when I point out that his judgment is entirely correct – only the Royal Highway happens to be the air.”¹

That kind of perspective was celebrated by both Henry Luce, the famous magazine magnate, and Clare Booth Luce his wife in their promotion of the American Century, and they had wide impact. The latter declared “We want to fly everywhere. Period” (249), but what exactly did that entail and what did the Americans want, particularly with regard to a postwar international commercial regime?

Secretary of State James Byrnes spoke of a postwar system based on “liberal principles of private enterprise, non-discrimination, and reduced barriers to trade” (248). This liberal mantra was used extensively by U.S. postwar planners across a wide range of economic sectors, but emphasis given by U.S. officials and politicians to the idea of freedom of the skies and opening up the world to civil aviation needs close scrutiny in order to see exactly what this meant in the civil aviation field. There were two sides to this that are best expressed in terms of ‘freedoms to fly’ and ‘freedoms to engage in commercial traffic.’ Both posed problems. It would avail the Americans little if they had world-beating airlines but lacked permission to fly them abroad and that was a problem that arose not only with the Soviets but also, and more importantly, with the British, who controlled or had influence over a third of the globe. Gaining access to air routes was always going to be a potential obstacle to postwar U.S. dominance of international aviation. Then, even if the right to fly were granted by foreign countries, there was the problem of making it profitable.

American policy was certainly committed to freedom of the air in terms of what came to be known as freedoms 1 and 2, of ‘innocent passage’ and ‘technical stop.’ This represented, if you will, Clare Booth Luce’s position: “We want to fly everywhere. Period.” This was what the open door for the Americans meant in aviation policy and it was seen as a necessary prerequisite to gain the postwar commanding position in civil aviation about which there was universal consensus in wartime Washington. However, the policy on the commercial regime for postwar civil aviation, while more liberal than the inter-war regime - it could hardly have been less so -- fell far short of a liberal ideal.

Predominance for the U.S. in civil aviation was an overriding priority not just for commercial gain, though that was significant, but most importantly for security and strategic reasons as well. Civil aviation production was the basis for expanding military aircraft production, helped develop technology, produced trained pilots and was a potent and visible symbol world-wide of the power of the United States. Given the fact that the U.S. was determined to have a preponderance of post-war civil aviation primarily for security and strategic reasons, that also meant that if there were a danger of the free

¹ *Roosevelt Library*, Papers of Harry Hopkins, box 132, folder: Aviation, Grover Loening to Hopkins, 22 May 1942.

market compromising that goal then free market principles would have to be overridden by strategic priorities. Thus the rhetoric heard from the Americans about freedom of the air meant, at least to most policy-makers in Washington, something rather different than freedom of the air for all-comers for commercial operations.

There was somebody on the U.S. side who was notably more liberal on this, namely President Franklin D. Roosevelt, and he did more than “sign on” (249) to the importance of civil aviation: he was a major mover in the whole business.

There were differing factions within the Roosevelt administration and there were two kinds of freedoms at issue: freedoms 1 and 2, which were seen as a prerequisite for U.S. civil aviation to flourish world-wide; and commercial freedoms 3, 4, and 5, which allowed for an airline of one country to take to and pick up passengers from another country and return them to the country of origin (the third and fourth freedoms) and the right to pick up passengers in another country and carry them forward to a third party destination (the fifth freedom). There was almost universal U.S. support for freedoms 1 and 2, even among the U.S. military in the end, but there were serious and important differences over 3, 4, and 5 and how they should be granted. A crucial point of difference within the administration was whether or not there should be an automatic multilateral exchange of third, fourth, and fifth freedom rights or whether they should be negotiated for bilaterally on a case-by-case basis.

At a meeting at the White House on 10 November 1943, the President laid out his policy on the crucial issue of commercial rights. He said he wanted “a very free interchange.” That is, he wanted arrangements by which planes of one country could enter any other country for the purpose of discharging traffic of foreign origin, and accepting foreign bound traffic.”² He knew what he was talking about. He clearly and precisely explained not only what later became commonly known as the third and fourth freedoms of the air, but also the fifth. Regarding the latter he actually illustrated what he meant by explaining that a Canadian line operating to Jamaica should be allowed to pick up fifth-freedom traffic in Buffalo for Jamaica, but not cabotage (services reserved for a country’s own domestic airlines) traffic for Miami. He was in fact drawing a picture of a general multilateral agreement that would automatically grant transit and stop and commercial outlets in terms of the third, fourth, and fifth freedoms to all nations who entered into consort.³ This was the President’s vision of freedom of the air: it was not that of Welch Pogue, the Chairman of the Civil Aeronautics Board, as he soon made clear in an important speech.

² USNA, 800.796/495 memorandum of conversation by Assistant Secretary of State Adolf Berle, 11 November 1943.

³ *Ibid.*

With respect to the granting of “commercial outlets” the right of any foreign airline to discharge and take on passengers and traffic, each nation must decide where its best interest lies. It would be quite unrealistic, at this stage of the world’s developments, to assume that such commercial outlets should be more or less automatically granted to all comers.⁴

This difference over the granting of commercial rights is important because it tells us more about the character of U.S. policy than is generally recognized. The U.S. did want to open up the world through the multilateral exchange of rights 1 and 2 to innocent passage and technical stop, as happened extensively at the Chicago Conference. However, Roosevelt also wanted a multilateral exchange of commercial rights, but Pogue, the head of the U.S. delegation at Chicago, did not. Pogue holds more responsibility for the failure of the Chicago Conference to agree on a commercial regime than has generally been acknowledged. The usual suspects for the failure are the British and their reluctance to concede to the Americans on virtually unrestricted fifth-freedom rights, but there is strong evidence to suggest that Pogue and others on the U.S. side never wanted a multilateral commercial agreement that would automatically exchange third, fourth, and fifth freedoms. Pogue worried that in the near future, countries with lower labour and operating costs than the U.S. would undercut U.S. airlines and lead to the loss of the kind of U.S. civil air preponderance that was universally agreed upon in Washington as an overriding priority. In short, perceptions of national interest trumped liberal trading principles: the U.S. would use its preponderance of power in bilateral talks for commercial rights, only granting access to the U.S. market where it felt it was safe to do so. That position was perhaps best expressed by head of Pan American World Airways, Juan Trippe, during the war:

... we should keep ourselves free of any general commitments in favor of reciprocity, ... we should seek landing rights without offering them, ... we should handle requests for landing rights from countries that have granted them to us, on their merits, that in practice ... we should successfully, and without jeopardizing our own position abroad, find plausible reasons to deny most requests and keep our concessions to a minimum.⁵

Pogue’s position was somewhat similar except Trippe wanted Pan Am to have a monopoly on U.S. overseas routes and Pogue wanted a multi-airline policy.⁶

⁴ Hopkins Papers, box 336, folder: Book 9 Air Conference Post War Aviation, Pogue to Hopkins, 10 November 1943, enclosing draft speech to New York Herald Tribune Forum to be delivered 16 November 1943.

⁵ *Berle Papers*, box 55, folder: Aviation International 1942-1943, R.G. Hooker to Berle, 15 June 1943.

⁶ For a much more detailed account and developed thesis see Alan P. Dobson, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and Civil Aviation 1933-1945: Flying High, Flying Free* (New York: Palgrave 2011).

From this context we can see that the differences that arose between the U.S. and the Soviet Union over civil aviation were from the outset more about strategic and security interests on *both* sides rather than the U.S. advocating commercial civil aviation and being resisted for security, strategic, and political reasons by the Soviets. Gormly makes the later strategic and political considerations very clear indeed, and does so effectively, but perhaps there should have been more emphasis on just how political and strategic all this was on the American side even in the beginning of talks. The Soviet refusal to take part in the Chicago Conference was no doubt partly informed by the general context of difficulties that were emerging between the allies and which subsequently became the Cold War. But one aspect was that the Soviets, like the British, knew how formidable the U.S. airlines would be after the war, given that they possessed the latest equipment, which neither the Soviets or the British had the immediate capability to manufacture on their own, and had crews who had long-range operations experience. It is doubtful if the Soviets ever wanted really to engage the U.S. in commercial competition, but they certainly wanted to avoid being humiliated by superior U.S. equipment and operating experience. Gormly traces the erratic course of discussions between the Americans and the Soviets in the pre-Chicago period with the Soviets initially seeming well disposed to opening air routes and then abruptly and rather puzzlingly backing away. Of course it is never easy to explain the logic of Soviet policy completely, but such factors were surely at play and all spiced with no little amount of Soviet paranoia.

The Soviets refusal to participate in the Chicago Conference posed some challenges for the U.S., challenges that grew as the Cold War developed and more and more of eastern and central Europe was closed off to the U.S. This was not just a political problem but a commercial one as well, as a huge swathe of the world was off-limits to U.S. airlines. That caused difficulties for routing the United States' world-wide network and particularly Pan American World Airways' much vaunted round-the-world route. Initially, as Gormly aptly demonstrates, the U.S. tried to develop aviation links with the emerging Bloc, particularly Czechoslovakia, but as the political and strategic situation in Europe deteriorated the it became less and less enamoured with the prospect of aviation links and reversed policy and even sought to close down routes that then existed and involved members of the Western Alliance. That policy caused difficulties, as several countries in Western Europe looked consistently to maintain more and better economic links with Eastern Europe and the Soviets than with the U.S. One can see the same pattern in allied relations in the Coordinating Committee that determined the extent of the Western strategic embargo (COCOM).⁷

⁷ See Alan P. Dobson, *US Economic Statecraft for Survival 1933-1991: Of Embargoes, Strategic Embargoes, and Economic Warfare* (London: Routledge, 2002); and "From Instrumental to Expressive The Changing Goals of the U.S. Cold War Strategic Embargo," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 12:1(Winter 2009-2010): 98-119.

In the aftermath of the 1948 Prague coup, the U.S. gradually led its allies into an uneasy consensus, which emerged by 1950. The onset of the Korean War naturally helped to pull the allies together and adopt a more uniform stance against the Soviet Bloc over trade, including civil aviation. However, as the Korean War came to an uneasy sort of closure, differences again arose in the Western Alliance about trade and commerce with the Soviet Bloc. Those differences then became acute in 1954 in the aftermath of the death of Stalin the previous March. Hopes developed in Western Europe for détente, led by Winston Churchill's push for a summit meeting and British insistence on reducing the strategic embargo list. These developments prompted moves that gradually led to the expansion of civil aviation services between the Soviet Union and the West. At first these were interline flights, whereby passengers were transferred from Western aircraft to Soviet aircraft, to avoid over-flight of Soviet territory. Such flights opened in France in 1955, but there were further developments with conventional direct flights between Finland and Moscow that same year.

The U.S. was uneasy, as Gormly amply demonstrates, with these developments, but in an alliance of democracies there are limits to the pressure that can be effectively applied by the alliance leader. In 1957 there was a renewed push from the British to relax trade restrictions with the Chinese and the Soviets, and while the U.S. vigorously opposed these moves, in the end it had to accept British unilateral action regarding the Chinese and concede to the overwhelming desire among its allies to liberalize trade with the Soviet Bloc. It was in this context that the U.S. itself opened talks with the Soviets about civil aviation in 1958, but it took a decade before Soviet-American direct air services were inaugurated between New York and Moscow. As Prime Minister Harold Macmillan once supposedly, but possibly apocryphally, quipped when asked about what caused difficulties in achieving things in politics: 'Events my dear boy: events.' And there were plenty of those that delayed U.S.-Soviet civil aviation developments: the Berlin Wall; the Cuban missile crisis, and the Vietnam War. Not until Lyndon Johnson became President and acted on his aim of bridge-building with the Soviet Bloc was a civil aviation agreement finally consummated and services begun in 1968. Even then, though this stretches beyond Gormly's time line, they were always subject to the vagaries of the Cold War. The Carter Administration suspended Aeroflot flights into New York in retaliation for the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, and President Ronald Reagan took similarly punitive action after the Soviets shot down a Korean airline (KAL007) in 1983. The commercial side of air services between the U.S. and the Soviet Union, as Gormly so well demonstrates, was always of secondary consideration to political, security, and strategic priorities.

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