

## GUIDELINES FOR BOOK REVIEW

I have asked you in this course to write a book review of Daniel Thomas, The Helsinki Effect (2001). The purpose of the exercise, as in the case of any book review, is to engage with and assess the author's principal contentions. To familiarize yourself with the book review as a genre, you might take a few minutes in the library stacks or on line and browse through reviews in notable historical journals like The American Historical Review and The Journal of Modern History (the reviews are almost always placed near the back of the journal, after the articles).

Although one may write reviews in a number of different ways, one very simple way is to divide your paper into two parts: **exegesis** and **assessment**. That is, in the first part of the paper, you attempt to summarize the principal findings and arguments that the author offers in the book. Obviously the author is providing a great deal of information. But what, in essence, is the central point that he/she wishes to make? Here, you'll want to lay out the author's argument as fairly and dispassionately as possible. The second part of the review could then be devoted to assessing the author's argument. You now have a lot of information that you have acquired in the course. You have at least some sense, based on this knowledge, about the relationship between international and domestic politics. Use this acquired knowledge to assess the book. Is the argument convincing? Has the author taken into account alternative explanations for the processes he describes? Has the author unduly focused on one group of historical actors to the neglect of others? Is the source base for the book, in your view, adequate? On what specific basis is the author making the claims that he does? In the final analysis, would you recommend this book to someone seeking to understand the connections between international agreements about human rights and the internal development of communist states in the 1970s and 1980s?

My own view is that writing a book review is hard work. So be sure to give yourself a fair amount of time for the exercise. Questions? Problems? Worries? Concerns? See me. Note also that your paper must conform with the general guidelines that I have established for all papers (these are available on the web site).