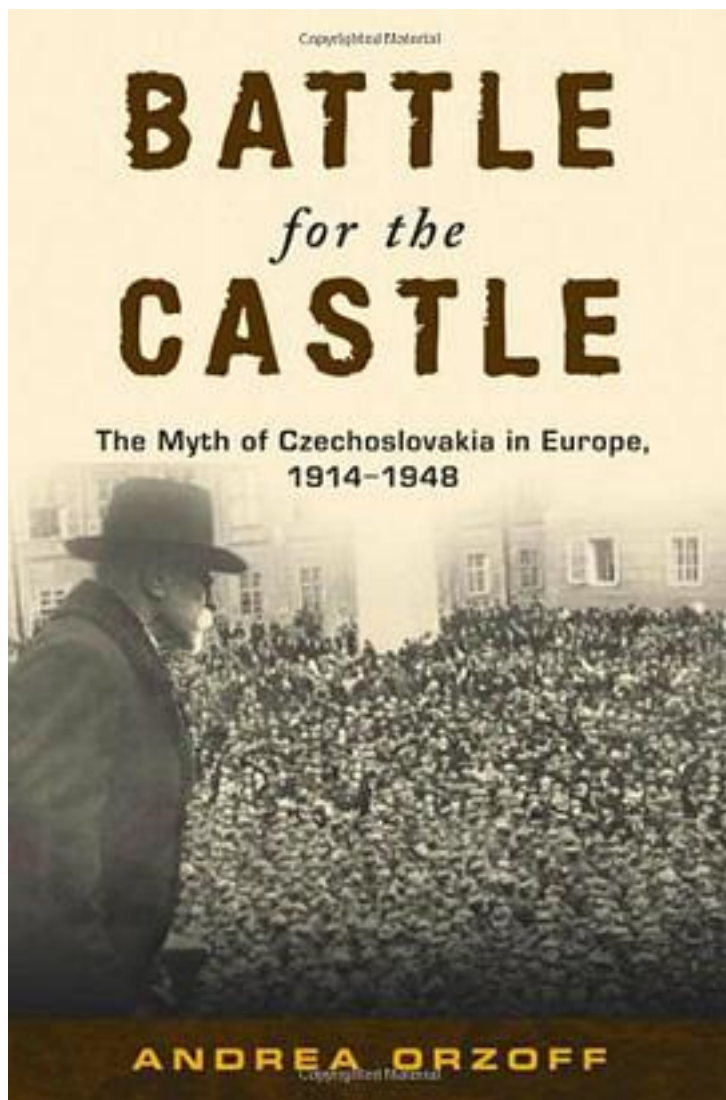


Battle for the Castle



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Since 1918, Czechoslovakia has been known as East-Central Europe's most devoted democracy, an outpost of Western values in the East. While the country has had more democratic experience than its neighbors, this book argues that the claim that Czechs are "native democrats," devoted to liberal ideas, emerged from nationalist myth. *Battle for the Castle* tells the story of that myth's creation during the First World War, used to persuade the Great Powers to create Czechoslovakia out of pieces of Austria-Hungary. Toma Masaryk and Edvard Beneš, the two academics crafting the myth and employing it for wartime propaganda, became Czechoslovakia's first president and prime minister. They tried to use the myth to outmaneuver political opponents at home and Czechoslovakia's enemies abroad. Those enemies, and the European Great Powers, also conducted their own propaganda campaigns targeting Czechoslovakia as a symbol of the postwar order. At home, while proclaiming themselves the protectors of democracy, Masaryk and Beneš played political hardball through their powerful political machine, the "Castle," and defended their legacy against their detractors. 1938 and Nazi occupation seemed to prove out the Castle myth's claims about pacifist Czechs and aggressive Germans. During the war, Beneš remade the myth to reflect changed international circumstances, particularly the Soviet Union's new power. After the war and the 1948 Communist takeover of Czechoslovakia, the myth entered Anglo-American historiography of Czechoslovakia and Eastern Europe. Within academic histories of Czechoslovakia - many of them written by Masaryk's students or Castle colleagues - the myth was transmuted into fact.

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