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Introduction: The Cold War as History

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The term “Cold War” refers to the state of tension, hostility, competition and conflict which characterized the West’s relations with the Soviet Union, and more particularly, Soviet–American relations for much of the post-war period. The Cold War was not premediated in the way that Hitler’s war had been, nor prepared for as was the case before the First World War. Rather it emerged as a consequence of a stand-off between the Western Powers and the Soviet Union whose wartime alliance had broken down amid a welter of suspicion, distrust and conflicting interests once the war against the Axis was over and the common enemy defeated. One of the fascinating things about Cold War history is that, despite the endless debate, there is little agreement about when it started or even where. Some would say that it began in eastern Europe; others argue that it was in Germany or the Near East; still others would say that the events which sealed the conflict occurred in the Far East.¹ Its clearest manifestation was the division of Europe into east and west by the Iron Curtain, the heavily guarded and fortified frontier which demarcated the boundaries between the western “liberal democracies” and the “people’s democracies” of what we used to call eastern Europe. Most symbolic of all was the division of Germany and in particular the partition of the city of Berlin, deep in the eastern zone, by a wall constructed in 1961 on Khrushchev’s instructions in order to stabilize the German Democratic Republic by halting westward migration.

1 See for example, W. Kimball, “Naked reverse right: Roosevelt, Churchill and Eastern Europe from Tolstoy to Yalta and a Little Beyond”, *Diplomatic History*, vol. 3, no. 2, spring 1979; B. Kuniholm, *The Origins of the Cold War in the Near East: Great Power conflict and diplomacy in Iran, Turkey and Greece*, Princeton, NJ, 1980; W. Stueck, *The Road to Confrontation: American Foreign Policy Toward China and Korea, 1947–1950*, Chapel Hill, 1981.

As the ambitions and insecurities of West and East came up against each other in the Middle East, the Far East, the Indian subcontinent, Africa and Latin America, each provided a forum in which the two superpowers waged their struggle for political, economic and ideological hegemony which was conducted by all means short of open armed conflict between them for over forty years. However, there is a paradox at the heart of the history of this period: despite the intensity and bitterness of the struggle, each of the superpowers was wary of action which might provoke a direct retaliation from the other and for protracted periods, the Cold War was characterized by a concerted effort on the part of the United States and the Soviet Union to establish a *modus vivendi* for peaceful coexistence. Periods of *détente* occurred in the late 1950s and, with an interruption at the beginning of the Kennedy administration culminating in the Cuban missile crisis, resumed in the mid-1960s; an interval of renewed tension at the end of the 1970s preceded the de-escalation of the conflict as the Soviet leadership concluded that its domestic disarray could be ignored no longer. This "long peace", as John Gaddis named it, was the product of a vested interest in stability consequent on the existence of nuclear weapons, a near monopoly of knowledge of this technology by the major powers, and the doctrine of mutually assured destruction.² Having teetered on the brink of a nuclear exchange in October 1962, the superpowers directed ever increasing diplomatic resources to weapons limitations agreements and constrained their respective clients from action which would draw them into open conflict.

The voluminous literature on the Cold War contains many good (and occasionally conflictual) analyses of the historiography of the period and particularly that relating to the question of causation.³ The objective here is to identify the principal strands and to discuss some of the more recent developments in the literature. The earliest attempts to offer an interpretation of Cold War origins were closely linked with, and defined by, the need to justify the creation in the United States of the national security state. During the 1950s considerable quantities of ink were spilt by commentators and officials in the attempt to define the

2 J. L. Gaddis, *The Long Peace: Enquiries into the History of the Cold War*, Oxford, 1987, pp. 215–45.

3 Of particular use are M. P. Leffler, "Interpretative Wars over the Cold War, 1945–60", in G. Martel (ed.), *American Foreign Relations Reconsidered, 1890–1993*, London, 1994, pp. 106–24; J. S. Walker, "Historians and Cold War Origins: The New Consensus", in G. K. Haines and J. S. Walker (eds), *American Foreign Relations: A Historiographical Review*, Westport, Conn., 1981, pp. 207–36; G. Lundestad, "Moralism, Presentism, Exceptionalism, Provincialism, and Other Extravagances in American Writings on the Early Cold War Years", *Diplomatic History*, vol. 13, no. 4 (1989), pp. 527–45; M. H. Hunt, "The Long Crisis in U.S. Diplomatic History: Coming to Closure", *Diplomatic History*, vol. 16 (1992), pp. 115–40.

enemy and thereby justify the vast and constantly increasing demands for expanding the defence budget. These accounts were heavily influenced by contemporary views of the Soviet political system and a conservative bias which predominated in intellectual circles in the immediate post-war period. Intrinsic to American political thinking since the late nineteenth century were assumptions about dictatorship and autocracy which held that such regimes could be characterized by oppression at home and aggression abroad, but the emergence of fascism and Nazism encouraged a conceptualization of totalitarian systems of government into which the Soviet Union under Stalin was readily fitted. This framework held that under totalitarian dictatorship power was indivisible and vested in the personality of its ruler; the system was incapable of change and its survival, moreover, was dependent upon pursuit of the goals identified in a messianic ideology by which the regime justified its existence. During the 1950s, this conceptualization provided the defining theoretical construct by which to justify American containment strategies.⁴ At the same time two decades of international disharmony which had preceded the Cold War, characterized by world depression, protectionism, the rise of the European dictatorships and renewed world war, led to the search for security and stability in the post-war period. The ideological fence-building which took place in the wake of the Second World War can be explained in part as a consequence of the insecurities of the interwar years.

The early accounts of Cold War origins were authored primarily by American scholars who drew heavily on published memoirs and diaries of serving officials as well as on such published diplomatic correspondence and state papers as were then available. Indeed, some writers such as Herbert Feis and William McNeil had been policy practitioners actively engaged in the events which they sought to explain. The questions which this school addressed were those about the policy process: who made policy, which policies did they choose and why, and once chosen, how were they implemented? The methodology was essentially hermeneutic and owed much to the nineteenth-century scholarship of Leopold von Ranke which presumed that "objective truth" could and should be established through perusal of diplomatic documents. Indeed, the process was not unlike that conducted in Europe during the 1920s and 1930s when the publication of state papers on the part of the First World War protagonists had informed a debate about the rightness or otherwise of the war guilt clause of the Paris Peace Treaties. The effect was not dissimilar. What emerged was an America-centric view

4 For an account of this concept's impact on twentieth-century historiography see A. Gleason, *Totalitarianism: The Inner History of the Cold War*, Oxford, 1995.

which explained the Cold War in terms of the impossibility of dealing with “the Soviets”. Several strands can be identified: the conservative approach which sought to condemn the Roosevelt and Truman administrations, the former for yielding too readily to Soviet demands at Yalta, the latter for hesitancy and inexperience; the liberals on the contrary, justified American foreign policy as a bold and imaginative effort to deal at one and the same time with Soviet expansionism and residual American isolationism which reached its pinnacle with the Truman Doctrine.⁵ A third strand which is also generally grouped with Orthodox accounts is Realism. This approach takes a deeply critical view of American foreign policy as being overly determined by moralistic and universalist ideals and unduly attentive to the ideological element in Soviet foreign policy at the expense of balance of power considerations. The Cold War, the realists argue, was inevitable because of the expansionist needs of both the Soviet and the American political systems.⁶

Therefore the “received wisdom” enshrined in orthodox history held that the breakdown of the Grand Alliance was due to Stalin’s inherent suspiciousness of the West and, in the case of both liberals and conservatives, to Soviet expansionism legitimized by the teleological goals of Marxist–Leninist dogma. Among the key primary sources invoked for this thesis was the “Long Telegram” penned in the American Embassy in Moscow by the Chargé d’Affaires, George Kennan, which attempted to explain to the Truman Administration the sources of Soviet foreign policy in terms of domestic politics and ideological considerations.⁷ Soviet demands arising from its concern for security were, he argued, insatiable. Moreover, he considered that “a permanent *modus vivendi*” existed in so far as Soviet foreign policy was founded on the belief that “it is desirable and necessary that the internal harmony of our society be disrupted, our traditional way of life be destroyed, the international authority of our state be broken, if Soviet power is to be secure”. Kennan argued that Soviet foreign policy was ideologically determined, but he

5 For example, the conservative thesis is advanced in W. H. Chamberlin, *America’s Second Crusade*, Chicago, 1950; the liberal interpretation is exemplified by H. Feis, *Churchill, Roosevelt, Stalin: the war they waged and the peace they sought*, Princeton, 1957, and Feis, *Between War and Peace: the Potsdam Conference*, Princeton, 1960.

6 The classic statement of Realist interpretations of Cold War origins is that by H. J. Morgenthau, *In Defense of the National Interest: a critical examination of American Foreign Policy*, New York, 1951, p. 116. See also N. A. Graebner, *Cold War Diplomacy: American Foreign Policy 1945–1960*, Princeton, 1962 and G. F. Kennan, *Realities of American Foreign Policy*, Princeton, 1954. For an example of an interpretation of Soviet foreign policy viewed from the realist perspective see A. Ulam, *Expansion and Coexistence: the History of Soviet Foreign Policy 1917–67*, New York, 1963.

7 Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, Diplomatic Papers, 1946* (cited hereinafter as *FRUS*), Washington, 1969, vol. vi, pp. 696–709.

also recognised a flexibility in the Kremlin's decision-making which could be invoked by demonstrations of American power.⁸ While Kennan himself was later to modify his views, and took a dim view of the containment policies which evolved in Washington as a consequence of his commentary, this characterization of the motives of the Soviet leadership became the centrepiece of the emerging Cold War paradigm in Washington and one which determined American foreign policy for several generations.⁹ The policy of containment was defined by the United States National Security Council in April 1950; this revealed that American policy makers, in the space of five years, had come to conceive of American national interests, and thus the Cold War, in global terms.¹⁰ Conveniently, the National Security Council's suppositions seemed to be confirmed by the timely outbreak of the Korean War in June 1950 which served to legitimize military as opposed to the purely economic containment of the communist world which Kennan had identified. One liberal orthodox writer (and former White House aide), Arthur Schlesinger, argued in a classic formulation of the Orthodox approach published in 1967 that the Cold War could have been avoided "only if the Soviet Union had not been possessed by convictions both of the infallibility of the communist world and of the inevitability of a communist world".¹¹ He continued that these convictions "transformed an impasse between national states into a religious war, a tragedy of possibility into one of necessity".

By the time Schlesinger wrote these words, the bipolarity which this thesis assumed and which defined international politics following the breakdown of the Grand Alliance in 1945, was under challenge. The newly emerging nations, whose numbers at the United Nations Organisation had significantly increased in the early 1960s, were having a considerable impact on international politics. The disinclination of the Afro-Asian states to align with either of the communist or western blocs gave them the opportunity to hold the balance of power in a game which was defined by the possession of nuclear weapons. While the newly emerging states were essentially highly diverse, they were united not just by a disinclination to align in Cold War terms, but also by their

8 For a useful summary see J. S. Walker, "Historians and Cold War Origins", pp. 207–36.

9 See for example, G. F. Kennan, "Containment: Then and Now", *At a Century's Ending: Reflections 1982–1995*, New York, 1996, pp. 110–15 and the exchange of letters between G. F. Kennan and J. Lukacs in *American Heritage* (December 1995), p. 65.

10 See *FRUS 1950*, vol. 1, pp. 237–92, "NSC-68 United States Objectives and Programme for National Security", 14 April 1950. The full text was published in *Naval War College Review*, xxvii, 6/seq., N. 255 (May/June 1975), pp. 51–108; for a commentary see T. Etzold and J. L. Gaddis, *Containment: Documents on American Policy and Strategy, 1945–1950*, New York, 1978.

11 A. Schlesinger, "Origins of the Cold War", *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 46 (October 1967), p. 52.

relative underdevelopment and need for assistance to achieve economic development. Their experience of European colonialism predisposed these states to a distaste for western interference and, at least in the short term, they saw in the communist system a more attractive model for rapid modernization. The task of influencing the newly emerging states became a priority for both the eastern and western blocs which now extended their competition out of Europe, where the battle lines were stalemated, into Africa, Asia and Latin America where the boundaries to superpower influence remained more fluid.

In the meantime, the logic of containment doctrines had led to a steady increase in the American commitment to Vietnam. The origins of American involvement lay, or so it seemed, in the very conceptualization of the Soviet system and Soviet–American relations which had been adopted by orthodox scholars as justifications of containment. Such challenges to the received wisdom combined with a wider disillusionment with American ideals and their foreign policy expression among radicals who in time defined themselves as of the New Left, and provided the stimulus for the emergence of a body of scholarship on Cold War origins. In fact, a revisionist literature existed well before Vietnam gained centrality in contemporary debate: studies such as those of William Appleman Williams and Denna Frank Fleming published in 1962 and 1961 respectively, challenged the orthodox assumption of naïveté in American foreign policy and the conclusion that it was “reactive” to Soviet inspired antagonism.¹² Drawing on the progressive ideas which were experimented with by students of international relations in the 1930s, these authors argued that the economic system and the privileges derived from it by the elite were in control of the foreign policy process.¹³ Thus, the requirement of market capitalism for constant expansion and non-interventionist political systems represented the driving forces behind the Wilsonian goal of making “the world safe for democracy” by which American actions were justified.

The revisionist school only really flourished, however, once the foreign policy consensus had broken down over the Vietnam War when the need was perceived to find an alternative explanation for world events than that offered by realism. This perhaps explains why it was the publication in 1965 of Gar Alperovitz’s monograph on the decision-

12 W. A. Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy*, rev. edn, New York: 1962; D. F. Fleming, *The Cold War and its Origins 1917–60*, 2 vols, Garden City, New York, 1961. See also L. Gardner *Architects of Illusion: Men and Ideas in American Foreign Policy 1941–1949*, Chicago, 1970; D. Horowitz, *The Free World Colossus: A Critique of American Foreign Policy in the Cold War*, New York, 1965; G. Kolko, *The Politics of War: the World and United States Foreign Policy, 1943–1945*, New York, 1968.

13 For example, C. A. Beard, *Roosevelt and the Coming of War*, New York, 1947.

making which led to the use of the atomic bomb to end the war with Japan which really provoked a revisionist debate about Cold War origins.¹⁴ Alperovitz attacked the orthodox position in the most radical manner, arguing that the United States had used the bomb not out of military considerations but in order to impress its power upon Stalin so as to achieve a favourable post-war settlement. Subsequently, more sophisticated revisionist works sought to show how the United States had tried firstly to demand open access to eastern Europe and upon receiving a rebuff, had then sought to reconstruct western Europe and particularly the western zones of Germany in the liberal democratic mould. During the 1950s and 1960s this extended into the Third World as decolonization opened up these regions to economic penetration. The creation of multilateral organisations, such as the United Nations and the International Monetary Fund, in which the United States had the largest share of the votes because it provided the most substantial proportion of the funds, were held up as further evidence of a drive to establish an international world along capitalist lines. This thesis was stated most starkly by Gabriel and Joyce Kolko who de-emphasized the importance of the Soviet Union as a factor in American foreign policy and identified these policies as determined by the nature of its capitalist system and by recurrent fears of recession: "The United States' ultimate objective", they argued, "was both to sustain and to reform world capitalism".¹⁵ Such socio-economic explanations were expanded upon by others such as Thomas Paterson who argued that the "national security and economic well-being of countries touched by the destructive force of World War II depended upon a successful recovery from its devastation . . . the United States alone possessed the necessary resources – the economic power – to resolve the recovery crisis". He adds that "Coercion characterised United States reconstruction diplomacy".¹⁶

With regard to the Soviet Union, the revisionists were influenced by theses currently being advanced by Sovietologists who were applying pluralist and bureaucratic models of politics to the Soviet system in order to elucidate these hitherto under-researched aspects of the one party state. This process was reflected particularly in the works of Gavriel Ra'anani and William McCagg who agreed that the United States was prepared to exploit the advantages inherent in its overwhelming military and economic strength to achieve leverage over the less pros-

14 G. Alperovitz, *Atomic Diplomacy: Hiroshima and Potsdam*, New York, 1965.

15 J. Kolko and G. Kolko, *The Limits of Power: the World and United States Foreign Policy, 1945–1954*, New York, 1972, p. 11.

16 T. G. Paterson, *Soviet–American Confrontation: Postwar Reconstruction and the Origins of the Cold War*, Baltimore, 1973, p. 260.

perous and developed Soviet Union; that the Kremlin was being forced into making concessions and thereby compromising its own national interests, in order to appease American demands.¹⁷ They concluded, therefore, that the Soviet decision to impose its politico-economic model on its sphere in eastern Europe could be interpreted as essentially a reaction to American expansionism. Picking up on the inclination of Sovietologists to seek evidence of pluralist manifestations in Soviet domestic politics, revisionist scholars began to focus on the domestic sources of Soviet foreign policy. Thus, Stalin was not portrayed as a twentieth-century despot, but rather as *primus inter pares*, a leader whose policy options were constrained by the needs to balance infighting within the bureaucracies and amongst members of the Politburo. Furthermore, they argued that the Soviet Union was not unduly expansionist while Stalin himself was a pragmatic leader who was prepared to make concessions if only the Americans had been willing to compromise their ambitions and recognize his legitimate concerns. Accordingly, his policies of consolidation in eastern Europe were perceived as hesitant and only after the Marshall Plan conference held in Paris in July 1947, which seemed to clarify the hegemonic ambitions of the United States in Europe, did the Soviet Union consolidate its sphere of control.

The debate provoked by revisionism was bitter, public and at times vitriolic.¹⁸ Like so many acrimonious disputes it was effective in provoking a new generation of scholars to critically reassess the evidence and explore new sources and fresh avenues of approach. In this task they were assisted by the release at the end of the 1960s and early 1970s of a great volume of official documentation pertaining to the mid-1940s. What emerged was a third school of interpretation, beginning with publication in 1972 of John Lewis Gaddis's masterly study of American foreign policy.¹⁹ Gaddis's early works are interesting because they incorporate elements of the revisionist thesis while simultaneously making an argument which is not entirely dissimilar from orthodoxy, and in this preoccupation with the state demonstrated tendencies which are usually associated with Realism. He accepts that the United States made

17 W. O. McCagg, *Stalin Embattled, 1943–1948*, Detroit, Michigan, 1978; G. D. Ra'anan, *International Policy Formulation in the USSR: Factional "Debates" During the Zhadonovschina*, Hamden, Connecticut, 1983.

18 For a summary see N. Graebner, "Cold War Origins and the Continuing Debate: A Review of Recent Literature", *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, vol. 13 (1969), pp. 123–32; M. Leigh, "Is there a Revisionist Thesis on the Origins of the Cold War?", *Political Science Quarterly*, vol. 89, no. 1 (1994), pp. 181–206.

19 J. L. Gaddis, *The United States and the Origins of the Cold War 1941–1947*, New York, 1972; "Was the Truman Doctrine the Real Starting Point?", *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 52 (January 1974), pp. 386–402.

a significant contribution towards the onset of the Cold War and that American foreign policy was determined by economic and ideological motivations. Further, he concedes that Stalin's objectives were limited. But he criticises the revisionists for placing emphasis on economic factors to the exclusion of political considerations which, he argues, were critical determinants of foreign policy. Partisan politics, ethnic voting blocs and rivalries between the legislature and the executive, were, according to Gaddis, the critical factors in defining American foreign policy. While he is convinced by arguments that economic weapons were employed to extract concessions from those who stood in the way of achievement of America's long term and ideological objectives, Gaddis differs from the revisionists in arguing that economics was only the means and never the ends of American foreign policy. Moreover, he asserts that primary responsibility for the Cold War lay with Stalin who was "immune from the pressures of Congress, public opinion or the press" and thus was free to direct his foreign policy unfettered by domestic considerations. Nor does Gaddis accept that Stalin was constrained by ideology: rather "he was the master of communist doctrine, not a prisoner of it . . . his absolute powers did give him more chances to surmount the internal restraints on his policy than were available to his democratic counterparts in the West".²⁰ In a later and equally seminal work, Gaddis develops this thesis further. American containment of the Soviet Union in the Cold War, he argues, was designed to balance world power.²¹ In effect this amounted to creation of an American empire, but the difference between this and earlier forms of imperialism as well as the Soviet variant, was that it was empire by invitation. America had been asked to extend its hegemony through economic aid to support liberal regimes which regarded themselves to be threatened by international communist subversion directed from Moscow.

The school of thought which this work spawned has been labelled post-revisionist, the central assumption of which is the liberal denial of the governance of politics by economics.²² The post-revisionist consensus, which Gaddis famously declared as emerging in 1983, is rooted in a thesis that American hegemonic behaviour is more accurately described as defensive rather than offensive expansion, "of invitation

20 Gaddis, *The United States and the Origins of the Cold War*, pp. 360–1.

21 J. L. Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: a critical appraisal of Postwar American National Security Policy*, Oxford, 1982.

22 B. Cummings, "Revising Postrevisionism", or The Poverty of Theory in Diplomatic History", *Diplomatic History*, vol. 17, no. 4 (1993), p. 551, n. 35; J. L. Gaddis, "The Emerging Post-Revisionist Synthesis on the Origins of the Cold War", *Diplomatic History*, vol. 7 (1983), pp. 171–93. It is unclear who first coined the term "post-revisionism".

rather than imposition, or improvisation rather than careful planning". The post-revisionists also maintain that it was Stalin's ill-defined but relentless search for security at the expense of his neighbours combined with the failure of the western powers to recognize his ambitions and draw the lines firmly enough to deter him that led to the Cold War. This thesis was supported by several scholars of Soviet foreign policy who during the late 1970s and early 1980s produced studies of Stalin's foreign policy which utilized the still fragmentary Soviet and east European sources.²³

Far from being consensual, post-revisionism has become the focus of particularly lively scholarly debate especially in the United States. Among its principal critics, Melvyn Leffler challenges the post-revisionist condemnation of Stalin's post-war foreign policy as the root cause of the Cold War.²⁴ Instead he argues that Soviet concerns were genuine and that it was testimony to the American preoccupation with geopolitical interests that no attempt (or very little) was made to consider what Soviet perceptions might be and to factor in the enormous losses suffered during the war in order to evaluate the motivations of Soviet demands for security on its frontiers. At the same time he agrees with Gaddis that the revisionists were incorrect in discounting American concerns about Soviet intentions, perceiving in the Truman Administration's policies a genuine preoccupation with Soviet strength and the Soviet Union's potential to exploit social and economic disruption to further its own interests.

More vigorous in their criticism of post-revisionism are those who have rooted their interpretations in more formal conceptual frameworks. Michael Hogan is among those who has employed the corporatist model as an analytical tool and demonstrates how self-interested collaboration among supranational organizations and public and private agencies formed the basis of a strategy which aimed to ensure capitalist expansion.²⁵ Secondly, there has been some experimentation with the world systems approach which purports to identify a structured world system, capitalist in nature, which effectively imposes limitations on attempts at socialist construction because of the distortions that the capitalist "reality" creates for non-capitalist states. Accordingly, scholars such as Bruce Cummings have explained American foreign policy in

23 V. Mastny, *Russia's Road to the Cold War: Diplomacy, Warfare and the Politics of Communism 1941–1945*, New York, 1979; W. Taubman, *Stalin's American Policy: From Entente to Détente to Cold War*, New York, 1982.

24 M. P. Leffler, "The American Conception of National Security and the Beginnings of the Cold War, 1945–48", *The American Historical Review*, vol. 89 (April 1984), pp. 346–81.

25 For example, M. J. Hogan, *The Marshall Plan: America, Britain and the Reconstruction of Western Europe, 1947–1952*, New York, 1989.

terms of a drive to revive world capitalism and to sustain the American position within that system.²⁶

Cold War history was enriched during the 1980s as a result of a burgeoning European scholarship which focused for the first time on the perceptions of the superpowers from the perspective of the European states. The stimulus for these studies lay immediately in the opening of the archives in accordance with the thirty-year rule which governs the release of government records, but the published results undoubtedly reflect the contemporaneous growth of European self-confidence in its search for a role and the definition of its interests as distinct from those of the United States. In so doing, however, European scholarship largely accepts the parameters of American debate in so far as it was also most sharply focused on the debate about origins. The principal underlying theme was that Europeans were not mere bystanders at a superpower struggle for influence; rather they were actors with independent voices which had had some influence on this process. Despite the crippling effects of the war, the European powers in reality played an important part in the reordering of the international system during the 1940s and the history of the Cold War is incomplete without a proper assessment and acknowledgement of their role.²⁷ Collectively, this scholarship produced a body of evidence which confirmed that various of the European Governments had also harboured deep anxieties about a Soviet challenge and that these had a significant influence on American foreign policy.²⁸ The British in particular, appear to have been rather more anxious about Soviet intentions immediately after the war and they did much to alert the Americans to the perceived dangers.²⁹ Indeed, with few exceptions, orthodoxy in terms of the acceptance of Soviet expansionism, has dominated European scholarship. Revisionism has never had much impact on the writing of Europe's Cold War history which may be a testament to the extent to which the

26 For example, T. J. McCormick, *America's Half-Century: United States Foreign Policy in the Cold War*, Baltimore, MD, 1989.

27 A. L. DePorte, *Europe Between the Superpowers: the Enduring Balance*, Yale, 1979; D. Reynolds, "The Origins of the Cold War: the European dimension 1944–45", *The Historical Journal*, vol. 28, no. 2 (1985), pp. 497–515.

28 B. Kuniholm, *The Origins of the Cold War in the Near East: Great Power Conflict and Diplomacy in Iran, Turkey and Greece*, Princeton, 1979; G. Lundestad, *America, Scandinavia and the Cold War 1945–1949*, New York, 1989; Kuniholm, "Empire by Invitation? The United States and Western Europe 1945–1952", *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 23 (1986), pp. 263–72; T. Anderson, *The United States, Great Britain and the Cold War, 1944–1947*, Columbia, MO, 1981; L. S. Kaplan, "Western Europe in the 'American Century': A Retrospective View", *Diplomatic History*, vol. 6, no. 2 (1982), pp. 213–26.

29 P. G. Boyle, "The British Foreign Office View of Soviet–American Relations, 1945–46", *Diplomatic History*, vol. 3 (1979), pp. 307–20; H. Thomas, *Armed Truce: the Beginnings of the Cold War, 1945–46*, London, 1986.

writing of history is affected by the wider intellectual fashion. By the time that the Europeans studied Cold War origins, new left thinking was already becoming passé.

The impact of the European contributions was to reveal a much more complex web of international relations than the quasi-political debate being conducted in the United States would allow and challenged both revisionism and post-revisionism in their assumptions that American foreign policy could be explained from domestic political sources alone.³⁰ One of the more penetrating critiques of earlier Cold War historiography and in particular its predisposition towards American exceptionalism appeared in *Diplomatic History* just as the Berlin Wall was being demolished.³¹ In this article the Norwegian scholar, Geir Lundestad, took issue with a methodology which has, in presuming American exceptionalism, concentrated exclusively on the development of American foreign policy without reference to the external factors by which it has been shaped. Only by taking into account the latter, can American exceptionalism, and particularly the nature of that exceptionalism, be proved.

Throughout the Cold War, the greatest stumbling block to a contextualization of American foreign policy was the absence of access to a comparable archival database on the Soviet side. Much has been written about the perceptions of the United States and its allies of the motivations for Soviet actions, but only a few scholars have tackled the problem from Moscow's perspective. Since the end of the Cold War and the opening of Russian, and to a greater extent, east European archives, some progress has been made in filling this gap.³² Two views of the problem emerge from recent literature. The first concerns the role of ideology. During the 1970s and 1980s, ideology had been regarded as a tool of limited value to students of Soviet foreign policy, except in the narrowest sense but the prominent role played by ideas in ending the Cold War has encouraged a re-examination of the ideological dimension in both American and Soviet foreign policy. In the Soviet context this has led to a fresh attempt to understand the complex relationship between Marxist–Leninist ideology, especially in its Stalinist variant, and the legacies of Russian imperial history to which the Soviet leaders

30 This point was made by D. Cameron Watt in "Rethinking the Cold War: a letter to a British Historian", *Political Quarterly*, vol. 49, no. 4 (1978), pp. 446–56.

31 G. Lundestad, "Moralism, Presentism, Exceptionalism, Provincialism and other extravagances in American Writings on the Early Cold War Years", pp. 527–45.

32 J. Haslam, "Russian Archival Revelations and Our Understanding of the Cold War", *Diplomatic History*, vol. 21, no. 2 (1997), pp. 217–28; see also W. C. Wohlforth, "New Evidence on Moscow's Cold War: Ambiguity in Search of Theory", pp. 229–42 and O. A. Westad, "Secrets of the Second World: The Russian Archives and the Reinterpretation of Cold War History", pp. 259–71, both in the same *Diplomatic History* journal.

were heirs.³³ Such interpretations emphasize the role played in the decision-making process of eschatological fears regarding the very survival of the regime. These were consequent on the experiences of intervention and isolation in the early years following the revolution, compounded by invasion and near defeat in 1941 and reinforced subsequently by the teachings of its founder who had much to say on the subject of capitalist encirclement. The task of protecting the regime only appears to have become a less pressing concern after Stalin's death. Similarly, the imperial tradition in Russian history was deeply ingrained in the post-revolutionary leadership: the Soviet leaders inherited a geopolitical entity acquired through imperial aggrandizement and the notion that the secession of territory amounted to a challenge to the regime's legitimacy was as firmly rooted in their minds as it had been in those who inhabited the Tsar's court. The objectives of furthering the cause of socialism, the triumph of which the Soviet leadership consistently believed to be inevitable, became inextricably linked with the preservation of territorial integrity and the Soviet Communist Party's leading role in the world communist movement. Believing the triumph of socialism to be unavoidable, the Soviet Union wished to assist communist parties abroad in furthering this end.

The second approach places renewed emphasis on Soviet security concerns.³⁴ While accepting that the Soviet Union was expansionist these scholars argue that this process was limited and determined by the perceived needs to secure Soviet borders from renewed German and Japanese aggression in particular but also, and by implication, from the hostile capitalist world. Some synthesis of both interpretations has been achieved by Vladislav Zubok and Constantine Pleshakov.³⁵ More generally, contemporary studies reveal that while the Soviet military establishment was indeed formidable, Soviet capabilities both military and domestic were nonetheless persistently overestimated by western

33 For an impression of the state of scholarship in 1991 see F. Fleron, E. P. Hoffman and R. F. Laird (eds), *Soviet Foreign Policy: Classic and Contemporary Issues*, New York, 1991; an overview of the Russian interpretation of Soviet history has been written by R. W. Davies, *Soviet History in the Yeltsin Era*, London, 1997. Examples of reinterpretations of Soviet foreign policy during the early Cold War which place emphasis on the ideological angle can be found in L. Gibianski, "The Soviet-Yugoslav Conflict and the Soviet Bloc" in F. Gori and S. Pons (eds), *The Soviet Union and Europe in the Cold War, 1945-1953*, London, 1996, pp. 222-45; D. T. MacDonald, "Communist Bloc Expansion in the Early Cold War: Challenging Realism. Refuting Revisionism", *International Security*, vol. 20 (winter 1995), pp. 152-88.

34 For example, S. N. Goncharov, J. W. Lewis and X. Litai, *Uncertain Partners: Stalin, Mao and the Korean War*, Stamford, 1993; M. N. Narinskii, "The Soviet Union and the Berlin Crisis, 1948-49", in F. Gori and S. Pons (ed.), *The Soviet Union and Europe in the Cold War*, pp. 57-75.

35 V. Zubok and K. Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War: From Stalin to Khrushchev*, Cambridge, MA, 1996.

policy-makers. This points to either a failure of intelligence gathering or a disfunction in the process through which such material was processed and analysed. Consequently, the perceptions of the Soviet Union's strength and intent became essentially self-serving to western establishment interests. Similarly the scant work done on the Soviet economy indicates the extent to which the "political economy of illusions" distorted official estimations of Soviet economic performance suggesting that Soviet claims to modernization were far too readily accepted at or near face value by the West. As yet, Cold War history has not adequately explained these misperceptions.³⁶

Just as there is no real consensus about the Cold War's origins, the question of how and why it ended remains similarly contentious. The events of the late 1980s were for the most part unforeseen and the Cold War's ending took students of international history, international relations and other branches of the social sciences by surprise. Several interpretations have emerged. The first argues that the timing indicates a triumph for the policies of the first Reagan administration which intensified the Cold War competition particularly in terms of military build-up and effectively overburdened the Soviet economic system, thereby forcing the Kremlin to admit that the Soviet economic system was so inherently flawed that it could no longer maintain even a pretense of keeping pace.³⁷ Acknowledging that the United States used its military power excessively at times, American military strength was perceived to have been fundamental to the containment of Soviet expansionism and in "forcing the Warsaw Pact to disintegrate and the Soviet Union to acknowledge the need for final reform". Accordingly, it followed that "containment" had been vindicated. This approach was given philosophical expression by Francis Fukuyama in an article published in 1989 which argued that the disintegration of communism represented "the end of history" in the Hegelian sense in so far as the search for political democracy had been finally realized and that "liberal democracy may constitute the end point of mankind's ideological evolution" and the "final form of human government" which could not be improved upon.³⁸ In short, liberal internationalism, democratic government and free markets had triumphed over state intervention and planning and coerced "progressivism" which had been the basis of communist structure. An alternative view argued that while contain-

36 O. Westad, *Diplomatic History*, vol. 21, no. 2 (1997), pp. 261–2.

37 S. Wells Jr., "Nuclear Weapons and European Security during the Cold War", M. Hogan (ed.), *The End of the Cold War: Its Meaning and Implications*, Cambridge, 1992, pp. 63–75.

38 F. Fukuyama, "The End of History?", *The National Interest* (summer 1989), pp. 3–18; Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*, Penguin, 1992, p. xi.

ment and the arms race had played an important part in hastening the Cold War's end, the primary catalysts were the domestic sources of the Soviet Union's demise and the voluntarism of its abdication from world power. While the Soviet system, as Kennan had observed forty years earlier, contained the seeds of its own destruction, it was Mikhail Gorbachev's attempts at reform which resulted in a revision of Soviet foreign policy objectives, in particular the abnegation of the Brezhnev Doctrine in April 1989. This released the People's Democracies from their obligations of obedience to the Soviet Communist Party and consequently brought the Cold War to a close.

Clearly, our knowledge of the Cold War as history rather than an ongoing process has to reopen the debate about its meaning and significance and this throws into relief research in the period between Stalin's death and Gorbachev's rise which is the background of historians' attempts to explain the Cold War's longevity. This process had been greatly enriched by the influence of new trends in the social sciences and experimentation with social science models of development in order to illuminate specific problems has become increasingly prevalent, particularly among scholars working with the post-1960s period for which there exists something of an historical vacuum in terms of secondary literature.³⁹ Similarly, there is some recognition of the instructive value inherent in the challenges to "traditional" historical writing raised by the new cultural history which, in placing emphasis on the social construction of memory postulates that historical memories are socially acquired and collective and are also constantly refashioned to suit present purposes. Michael Hogan, in a recent collection on Hiroshima has demonstrated how this approach can be used to stimulate fresh examination of old debates.⁴⁰ But even for those who have declined to incorporate postmodernist thinking in their research methodology, the preoccupations with domestic, social and economic issues have diluted the tendency of international history to focus on policy and policy-makers, while experiments with social science theories have blurred the distinctions between history as a discipline and political science as seems only appropriate given the interdependent nature of their relationship.⁴¹ Nonetheless, the struggle continues to find a balance between oversim-

39 R. N. Lebow and J. G. Stein, *We All Lost the Cold War*, Princeton, 1994; B. Cummings, *The Origins of the Korean War*, vol. 2, *The Roaring of the Cataract 1947-50*, Princeton, 1990; G. A. Craig and A. L. George, *Force and Statecraft: Diplomatic Problems of Our time*, 3rd edn, Oxford, 1995.

40 An example of how this method can be employed to effect is that of M. Hogan (ed.), *Hiroshima in History and Memory*, Cambridge, 1996.

41 M. Hunt, "The Long Crisis in US Diplomatic History: Coming to Closure", *Diplomatic History*, vol. 16 (1992), pp. 115-40.

plification and historical reductionism on the one hand, and “mindless eclecticism” on the other.⁴²

The study of the Cold War remains a thriving and vital area of historical endeavour, and access to new sources of documentary material as well as the provocations of the profession’s sceptics provides every incentive for the reopening of old debates and the constant revision of interpretations of exactly what did happen and why. While Cold War history provides prime examples of the exploitation of history for contemporary political purposes, this is all the more reason why a decade after its passing, students should be encouraged to study the Cold War as history and demand access to the records which can shed light on the policy-making processes which gave this era its specific character. Only by these means can the many historical “myths” to which it gave rise be challenged, and absolute advances in knowledge achieved. In the words of one British historian, “if history is a constant re-writing and re-interpretation, it is also a cumulative development”.⁴³ This process of accumulating knowledge about the Cold War and assessing the significance of new findings in the light of what is already known is still very much in its infancy.

42 See J. L. Gaddis, “New Conceptual approaches to the Study of American Foreign Relations: Interdisciplinary perspectives”, *Diplomatic History*, vol. 14, no. 3 (1990), pp. 406–10. A contrasting view appears in B. Cummings, “Revising Postrevisionism: the Poverty of Theory in Diplomatic History”, *Diplomatic History*, vol. 17, no. 4, pp. 539–69.

43 A. Marwick, *The Nature of History*, 3rd edn, London, 1989, p. 15.

Part I

Cold War Origins

Introduction to Part I

The debate about Cold War origins is one about perceptions and intentions. What were the driving forces of Soviet and Western foreign policies? To what extent was the Cold War a struggle rooted in an ideological clash? Or was it about a mere traditional contest for hegemony and the balance of power which had characterized earlier periods of colonialism? How far did economic or military needs determine political decisions and what impact, if any, did personalities have on the onset of the conflict? At the heart of this debate is the question of whether this struggle was in some sense “inevitable”. Since the late 1940s determinists of various persuasions have sought to explain how the Cold War was preordained, and yet the very fact that there is still a “debate” about why the Cold War occurred implies that there could have been a different and possibly better outcome. Regardless of the emphasis scholars choose to adopt in explaining the onset of the Cold War, any reading of the papers of the protagonists in east and west reveals the extent to which all were seeking to get a clear understanding of the others intentions. Why then did this period of uncertainty crystallize into a Cold War in which each side conducted its planning on the basis that its worst assumptions about its adversary were correct?

Turning first to Soviet foreign policy, there are clear paradoxes which undoubtedly led to confused responses on the part of western governments. In 1945, the western powers understood that the Kremlin was pre-occupied with post-war security and recognized that it had legitimate demands regarding its immediate neighbours and the former Axis powers. There was also an awareness that the Soviet Union required peace: the war had been immensely costly in human as well as material terms and,

moreover, it had followed upon a period of intense and brutal industrialization. More ominously, however, the Soviet Union had re-emerged from its post-revolutionary isolationism to resume its role as a great power in Europe. The difference now was that only an enfeebled Britain remained to challenge the Soviet might on the continent, and the British government was far from sure that it was equal to that task.

While western diplomats pondered alternative explanations of Soviet actions, they focused increasingly on the nature of the Soviet system. The fact that it sought its legitimacy from pursuit of the teleological goals of the radical left in general and of world communism in particular was a persistent concern. It made it possible to interpret the actions of the Kremlin as determined by ideological needs to achieve that revolution which according to Marxist–Leninist dogma would alone ensure the security and the survival of the Soviet system. John Lewis Gaddis is firmly convinced of the need of the Soviet Union to expand. The poor economic foundations on which the Soviet system was based required this. Moreover, Gaddis argues that the Soviet Union saw itself as the centre from which global socialism would emanate. Thus, according to Gaddis, the mainsprings from which Soviet foreign policy flowed was Moscow's belief that territorial acquisition rather than historically determined class struggle would achieve the goal of world revolution. Melvyn Leffler is in agreement that the "real imponderable was whether the Kremlin wanted more than just security". However, he is less convinced than Gaddis of the ideological motivations of Soviet foreign policy. Instead, he links the Soviet Union's immediate and justifiable peace conference demands, rooted in legitimate security interests in eastern Europe, with the possibility that the Kremlin might have been motivated by traditional great power ambitions to maximize the opportunities for territorial expansion and control of resources.

Germany lay at the heart of the Cold War dispute because it was here that the Soviet vision of the post-war settlement came into conflict with that of the United States and its western allies. The United States, the mainland of which had no experience of direct assault let alone invasion, had justified the shedding of American blood with the argument that it was a war of liberating Europe from Hitler and a war which was fought for a post-war order to be built on the "four freedoms". The antithetical nature of this idealism with that of the Soviet Union explains in some measure the anxiety which pervaded the foreign ministries of the western powers as they sought to interpret the Kremlin's actions. After all, western liberal democracy was perceived as being vulnerably exposed to the revolutionary methods by which the Soviet leadership had acquired power and subsequently governed their state. American foreign policy, moreover, was also riven by internal contradictions. These existed between those

who took a Europeanist and even universalist view and who sought for the United States the hegemony in Europe and the Pacific which flowed from its status as a superpower. Others argued for a prompt retreat, especially from Europe, and even a return to isolationism. Alongside this debate was the pressure for commercial expansion which the highly industrialized American economy appeared to demand as a result of its wartime prosperity. Similar pressure resulted from the symbolic American power of a formidable military establishment which alone in the world had custody of the atomic bomb.

Gaddis expresses a readiness to identify the expansionism inherent in American capitalism as a factor in explaining Cold War origins. Indeed he argues that the potential for Soviet–American conflict was established in 1918 with the defeat of European colonialism and the old order which created a vacuum which these two new ideologies could fill. The Second World War had forced the two societies to abandon their interwar isolationism and thereby brought them into a collision in Europe. However, he concludes that the United States was ultimately a reactive power and that the primary element in bringing about the Cold War was the personality of Josef Stalin. Paranoid, secretive and obsessive about the need for security, “it was Stalin’s disposition”, Gaddis writes, “to wage Cold Wars”.

Leffler’s interpretation, while sharing many of Gaddis’s reservations about Soviet intentions, is rather more equivocal in its view of American foreign policy. Accepting the ambiguities of the Kremlin’s actions and the sense of insecurity which pervaded the western European states in the aftermath of the war, Leffler argues that America perceived itself to be vulnerable and that the explanation for this is complex. Economic concerns, stemming from the recent experience of the Great Depression, anxieties about the possibility of military attack, albeit only a distant danger, and the possibility that a rival would develop comparable war-making capabilities were important aspects. These factors were compounded by a real fear of the politics of the left which sought to resist any restoration of the old order and evidence of the extension of Soviet power in Europe through consolidation of the Soviet system in the satellites.

By examining the sources of the perceptions and misperceptions on the part of the two most powerful states in the Cold War era, these two authors explore the connections between the ideological rivalry which gave this period its unique character. They also consider the underlying political, social and economic factors which both guided and constrained the policies of the two superpowers.

