

2016

# A Historiography on the Origins of the Cold War

Juliana Mastrangelo

LaSalle University, [mastrangelo2@student.lasalle.edu](mailto:mastrangelo2@student.lasalle.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: [http://digitalcommons.lasalle.edu/the\\_histories](http://digitalcommons.lasalle.edu/the_histories)



Part of the [History Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Mastrangelo, Juliana (2016) "A Historiography on the Origins of the Cold War," *The Histories*: Vol. 3 : Iss. 2 , Article 8.

Available at: [http://digitalcommons.lasalle.edu/the\\_histories/vol3/iss2/8](http://digitalcommons.lasalle.edu/the_histories/vol3/iss2/8)

This Paper is brought to you for free and open access by La Salle University Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Histories by an authorized editor of La Salle University Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [careyc@lasalle.edu](mailto:careyc@lasalle.edu).

## *A Historiography on the Origins of the Cold War*

*By Juliana Mastrangelo*

The twentieth century was a period marked by almost incessant war. World War I saw the world's first mechanized form of total warfare. World War II saw the rise and fall of regimes. But the Cold War was much different, as it proved to be the ultimate showdown of two very different yet abiding ideologies known to man. One may reflect on the causes responsible for producing nearly a century of conflict and devastation and while the answers may seem rather straightforward in regards to both World Wars, there has been much debate on the origins of the Cold War. Prior to developing one's own hypothesis on the matter, it is important to delve into the opinions of those who came before us, and who actually lived through this icy conflict. The purpose of this report then, is to examine the various historiographical schools associated with the exploration of Cold War origins.

It is said that "History is written by the victors". Though the Cold War was far from being won when it began in 1945, the U.S. had undoubtedly emerged from World War II stronger than any other one of its allies, being Great Britain and the Soviet Union. Despite a wartime loss of 400,000 brave souls (rather trifling when compared to that of the Soviet Union), one could virtually agree that America was unscathed and embarking on a route to unforeseen prosperity upon which rested the hopes of thousands of war-weary peoples in Europe as they tried to rebuild their societies. It is in this context that the first writers of Cold War history are found. Members of this group are most often referred to as Traditionalists or Orthodox. Though each of their interpretations vary, their writings nonetheless reflect a sense of congruity in the

belief that the actions of the Soviet Union, as directed by its leader Joseph Stalin, should be viewed as aggressive with expansionist aims that threaten the sense of freedom fostered by the United States and is therefore responsible for the breakup of the Grand Alliance. Perhaps one of the greatest proponents of the Traditionalist theory is George F. Kennan, former American ambassador to the Soviet Union. Besides the “Long Telegram”, one of his most influential writings is entitled *The Sources of Soviet Conduct*, written under the pseudonym X, in which he becomes the first to call for a policy of containment in the upcoming struggles with the Soviet Union. Throughout the article, Kennan constantly harks on the importance of Marxist theory and ideology in attempting to understand the causes of Soviet behavior. For Kennan, it was communist ideology that created a deep sense of insecurity which drove the need for expansionist policy in the Soviet Union. Kennan makes his thoughts clear when he asserts that “Ideology...taught them that the outside world was hostile and that it was their duty eventually to overthrow the political forces beyond their borders.”<sup>1</sup> He goes on to explain this hostility which centers around “belief in the basic badness of capitalism and in the inevitability of its destruction.”<sup>2</sup> Further, because of this perceived struggle which deluges the Soviet mind, Kennan argues that there can never be cooperation between the United States and the Soviet Union let alone even a degree of sincerity in their relations since “Marxian ideology” has so tainted the Russian perception of the world. For the author, the struggle between communism and democracy has just begun. In looking back on Russian history, he posits the limit of Soviet security in the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. “They alone believed they knew what was good

---

<sup>1</sup> George F. Kennan, “The Sources of Soviet Conduct” *Foreign Affairs* 25, no. 4 (1947): 852-868; 855.

<sup>2</sup> Kennan, “The Sources of Soviet Conduct”, 858.

for society and that they would accomplish that once their power was secure and unchallengeable.”<sup>3</sup> This very phrase speaks volumes since it accomplishes three things: 1) Conceivably traces the origins of the Cold War back to this episode in Russian history. 2) Recognizes the source of Soviet insecurities and its link to ideology. 3) Represents to what great lengths the Soviets would go to secure their power. Taking into account all of these factors just mentioned and also aware that, for the Russians, this is essentially a “duel of infinite duration” (Communist ideology only refers to the *inevitable* breakdown of capitalist states), Kennan advises that the best long term route in combating this rival is by finding the “strength and resourcefulness to contain Soviet power.”<sup>4</sup>

Kennan never ceases in depicting a hostile image of the Soviet Union. His opinion is clear, “Soviet policies do not reflect...a love of peace or stability.”<sup>5</sup> He warns that there should be absolutely no hope in deliberation since Marxist ideology naturally fosters a sense of insecurity in its followers which in turn expresses itself through insincere motives. “If the Soviet government occasionally sets its signature to documents...it should be taken in the spirit of caveat emptor.” By the end of his “X article”, Kennan champions America’s role as the great defender of freedom and democracy. In order “to avoid destruction” the United States must “confront the Russians with unalterable counterforce at every point” where the hopes of a free and peaceful world are endangered by the iron-fist.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> Kennan, “The Sources of Soviet Conduct”, 855.

<sup>4</sup> Kennan, “The Sources of Soviet Conduct”, 862.

<sup>5</sup> Kennan, “The Sources of Soviet Conduct”, 867.

<sup>6</sup> Kennan, “The Sources of Soviet Conduct”, 868.

Similar to Kennan's views, are those of another very influential Traditionalist named Arthur Schlesinger. In his article *The Origins of the Cold War*, Schlesinger too realized the striking connection between Leninist ideology and the Soviet sense of insecurity. This sense of insecurity again, could be found both within the Soviet Union itself and in its villainous view of the outside world, manifested through Soviet foreign policy actions. In contemplating the root causes of the Cold War, Schlesinger expresses quite clearly his opinion that "Leninism and totalitarianism created a structure of thought and behavior which made postwar collaboration between Russia and America-inherently impossible."<sup>7</sup> However, unlike Kennan Schlesinger posits another theory that would prove invaluable in shaping the initial Cold War atmosphere, and that is Joseph Stalin.

Schlesinger elaborates much more on the character and personality of Stalin as well as the role he played in major events which arguably can be said to have sparked the onset of the Cold War. He mentions the violations of the promises at Yalta. Stating that in 1945, "Stalin himself was of two minds:...internal reconstruction and development of Russia; the other its external expansion."<sup>8</sup> Clearly, placing Stalin's priorities out of line with those of Britain and the U.S. who were focused on consolidating plans for a peaceful postwar coalition as well as immediate tactics to end the war in the Pacific. He then mentions the Russian request to be granted six billion dollars for postwar reconstruction; a request that was misplaced by the American government, although the Soviets would never believe such a thing. Lastly, the topic of Lend-Lease is introduced as a cause of preliminary tension when in May 1945, the abrupt cessation of aid was

---

<sup>7</sup> Arthur Schlesinger, "Origins of the Cold War" *Foreign Affairs* 46 no. 1, (1967): 1-13; 12.

<sup>8</sup> Schlesinger, "The Origins of the Cold War", 7.

perceived by Stalin to be “pressure on the Russians in order to soften them up.”<sup>9</sup> Each one of these incidents resulted in an increase of mutual suspicion however, that suspicion became further amplified in Russia by Stalin’s own intense feelings of paranoia. For him, the preceding events were proof that the “West was resuming its old course of capitalist encirclement” and therefore, the “Russians saw no choice but to consolidate their security in Eastern Europe.”<sup>10</sup> Schlesinger’s portrayal of Stalin as a man who “expressed terrifying instabilities of the mind” and who was prone to deep obsessions and a fiery temperament has persisted for more than fifty years in Cold War scholarship.<sup>11</sup>

Still despite such an eccentric personality, Schlesinger and others (who shall be mentioned later) believe that Stalin alone could have prevented the start of the Cold War. As leader of the Soviet Union, he exercised total control over government politics-namely foreign policy-and had the power to brand a new image of Western states into the minds of the Soviet people. President Roosevelt realized this and the hope of bringing the Russian people closer to the establishment of a democracy fueled most of his generous foreign policy in regards to Russia. Yet, despite the president’s efforts and even those of former President Truman, there was nothing that could loosen the grip that Leninist ideology had on the minds of the Soviets, and especially that of Stalin. “Stalin and his associates were bound to regard the United States as the enemy because of the primordial fact that America was the leading capitalist power and thus, by

---

<sup>9</sup> Schlesinger, “The Origins of the Cold War”, 9.

<sup>10</sup> Schlesinger, “The Origins of the Cold War”, 9.

<sup>11</sup> Schlesinger, “The Origins of the Cold War”, 9.

Leninist syllogism...hostile to Soviet Russia.”<sup>12</sup> So the Cold War, according to Schlesinger one could say, was preordained by Communism and its impact on the minds of Soviet leaders.

In total agreement with the interpretations of both Kennan and Schlesinger, William Hardy McNeill appears as another one of the great Traditionalists. Recently deceased in July 2016, McNeill retired as professor Emeritus at the University of Chicago where he taught history since 1947. In his book *America, Britain, and Russia: Their Cooperation and Conflict 1941-1946*, McNeill provides an in-depth and extensive review of the “Anglo-Russo-American” Alliance of World War II. Again, in discerning the possibility of maintaining postwar cooperation, McNeill insists that the alliance was ill-fated from the start due to the forces of communist thought which imbued Soviet policy. “The weight of a life-long Marxist indoctrination resisted the thought that British and American capitalists could for their part be really sincere.”<sup>13</sup> This chasm reflected itself in nearly all aspects of state to state relations during the war from the Lend-Lease Act to the Yalta and Potsdam conferences, in particular. McNeill stresses the inconsistency in regards to prime concerns held by the three world leaders for the end of World War II and postwar functioning. He lists very clearly Stalin’s demands at Yalta which at first glance seem fairly reasonable. “He wanted what help he could get for the economic reconstruction of the Soviet Union...Secondly, in return for his intervention against Japan, Stalin wished to acquire the territories which the Tsarist Government had lost...and to lay the basis for the future of security of his country.”<sup>14</sup> It was this last demand that the Allies didn’t quite understand. So hopeful for a peaceful postwar alliance and the promise in aid against Japan,

---

<sup>12</sup> Schlesinger, “The Origins of the Cold War”, 12.

<sup>13</sup>William Hardy McNeill, *America, Britain, & Russia: Their Cooperation and Conflict, 1941-46*. (New York: Johnson Reprint Corp, 1970), 76.

<sup>14</sup> McNeill, *America, Britain & Russia*, 533.

Roosevelt overlooked the consequences of Stalin's wishes; the heart of which lied in the fact that "future security of the Soviet Union required the establishment of governments friendly to Russia...a government which satisfied the Soviets...could hardly at the same time satisfy Western powers."<sup>15</sup> Consequently, McNeill goes on to condemn Russian preemptive actions in Eastern Europe that would've threatened the spread of democracy and with it, capitalism; while instead praising the efforts of the Anglo-American pact against Russian aggression. He berates the personality of Joseph Stalin stating that "the concentration of authority in the person of Joseph Stalin was the dominant characteristic of the Soviet system. In effect, negotiation was...impossible."<sup>16</sup> And though he recognizes the amount of disillusionment which guided the alliance on all sides in the first place, he can not help but express a deep annoyance (for lack of better words) in the effects of Marxist-Leninist ideology which formed the foundation of the deep gap which lay between Soviet and Western values, of which no amount of cooperation could bridge.

Herbert Feis is an Orthodox observer of Cold War origins who, similar to McNeill, also focused his interpretation on the breakdown of the Grand Alliance and state to state relations as they were during World War II. What appears most striking in Feis' novel entitled *Churchill, Roosevelt, Stalin: The War They Waged and the Peace They Sought* is his harsh critique of the Soviet spread in Eastern Europe. Feis denounces any Soviet actions in the region, which apparently "evidenced an unwillingness to trust the outcome of the democratic political contest",

---

<sup>15</sup> McNeill, *America, Britain & Russia*, 533.

<sup>16</sup> McNeill, *America, Britain & Russia*, 79.

as containing within them a propensity for a worldwide communist takeover.<sup>17</sup> Perhaps overstating his point, Feis refers to the build up of Soviet “satellites and armies, and additional economic resources” as a way to gain “a favorable chance for Communism to spread its influence.”<sup>18</sup>

Meanwhile, he condones American and British interference in these regions “as they were willing to respect the rights of other peoples to choose” and generates an impression that American acts were performed defensively, in order to protect their interests and those proving most beneficial to the world as a whole after the despoliation of the war.<sup>19</sup>

Though it may seem a bit far-fetched, the idea that the Communist Party in Russia was bent on leading a revolutionary takeover of the whole world was actually a deeply held conviction in the minds and hearts of the American people at the time. The final Orthodox historian to be mentioned in this essay, Thomas Bailey, offers great insight into popular opinion and its effects on foreign policy which drove the Cold War. Bailey’s book *America Faces Russia* is remains one of the more innovative expounders of Cold War origins. Published in 1950, Bailey’s analysis of popular opinion which defined Russian-American relations stretches from its inception in 1809 to what was considered modern-day. Bailey focuses largely on “diplomatic problems...and American attitudes towards such problems” in hopes of enlightening his audience on the true nature of the “Russian menace” throughout Russian-American history.<sup>20</sup> By beginning his

---

<sup>17</sup> Herbert Feis, *Churchill, Roosevelt, Stalin: The War They Waged and the Peace They Sought*. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1957), 563.

<sup>18</sup> Feis, *Churchill, Roosevelt, Stalin*, 563.

<sup>19</sup> Feis, *Churchill, Roosevelt, Stalin*, 563.

<sup>20</sup> Thomas Bailey, *America Faces Russia: Russian-American Relations from Early Times to Our Day* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1950) V.

inspection of relations in the Tsarist period of Russian history, Bailey becomes one of the first to stretch the origins of the Cold War or rather, the imminent threat of dissension, way past the Grand Alliance of World War II. He points to men like George Kennan the Elder whose pilloried accounts of a Tsarist Russia “held more weight because he spoke as an American citizen” or the many editors of American newspapers who often revealed a distorted image of Russian politics to U.S. citizens.<sup>21</sup> It was this continuous flow of denunciation, for example found in the following quote from New York’s *Herald Tribune* which read: “Soviet lies have made Russia’s word as good as her bond”, that stuck in people’s minds and fostered Soviet hostility which was bound to erupt into the Cold War despite Roosevelt’s many efforts to decrease anti-Soviet sentiments.<sup>22</sup> Now, despite what may seem as a fairly pleasant approach to Russian-American relations, Bailey utilizes these examples to form his argument that foreign policy towards Russia as was carried out through World War II, was absolutely affected by American public opinion. Roosevelt is well known for making decisions based upon opinion polls. He takes into account the amount of negative stereotypes conveyed to the public, in order to cast blame on media persons and even government officials who were responsible for creating these images. Perhaps if their depictions of Russia were different, the Cold War could’ve been avoided altogether. Yet, despite what may seem as a fairly pleasant view of Cold War origins, Bailey’s writings still hold a degree of prejudice against the Soviets as is typical in Orthodox thought. He takes into account the usual major events associated with the onset of Cold War, including the Lend-Lease Act and the broken promises at Yalta whereby “Americans were disturbed by the inability of the Soviets

---

<sup>21</sup> Bailey, *America Faces Russia*, 132.

<sup>22</sup> Bailey, *America Faces Russia*, 264.

to agree with the Western world in terms of peace.”<sup>23</sup> Bailey mentions how the “Russians persistently declined to join many of the organizations set up by the United Nations” thus further alienating themselves from the world and efforts designed to ensure peace.<sup>24</sup> And in referring to the postwar problems of Eastern Europe, he laments the “Soviet darkness which descended...” upon many Eastern European nations.<sup>25</sup> Ultimately, Bailey too recognizes and scorns the amount of “Soviet distrust and obstruction” which alone, could’ve determined the course of events to come.<sup>26</sup>

In spite of the lingering prejudice, the originality in Bailey’s account would continue to be observed and followed in future representations of Cold War origins, most especially in post-revisionist accounts. However, before moving further one must stop to evaluate the validity of Traditionalist theory as it has been described in this report. Firstly, the orthodox line of thought in regards to the origins of the Cold War should by now be evident. Though some works were elaborated upon more than others or manipulated in such a way as to show their diversity in terms of interpretation, the key elements to each argument are as follows:

1. Soviet aggression in terms of expansionist policies primarily in Eastern Europe did not correspond to the dispositions adhered to in the Grand Alliance, this recalcitrance destroyed any hope of a peaceful postwar cooperation among nations.
2. Communist ideology and Russia’s history of invasion produced a paranoia in regards to security. This mindset imbued Soviet foreign and domestic policy, and especially Soviet

---

<sup>23</sup> Bailey, *America Faces Russia*, 325.

<sup>24</sup> Bailey, *America Faces Russia*, 329.

<sup>25</sup> Bailey, *America Faces Russia*, 330.

<sup>26</sup> Bailey, *America Faces Russia*, 328.

leaders were in control of such. As a result, the clash between capitalist and communist countries became inevitable to all involved. There could be no hope of negotiation.

3. The United States sought only peace and cooperation. When it was clear this could not be achieved on account of the doggedness of Russian aims, America acted to defend the principles of freedom and democracy around the globe from communist aggression which was intent on leading a worldwide revolution.

It was in these ways, the origins of the Cold War evolved to place blame solely on Russia. As the first school of meaning, the Orthodox explanation continues to carry much weight in Cold War discussions. It was obviously born from a very strong sense of patriotism that emerged after the Allied success of World War II and so, found its way easily into the hearts and minds of many Americans as well as other patrons of democracy across the globe, who accepted its veracity without question. And a degree of truthfulness much exist considering the quality and amount of sources used to build such arguments. Thomas Bailey quotes almost entirely from *Public Opinion Quarterly* and each one of these men also utilized a great deal of State Department and archival records, which provides great insight into the workings of the American government. Letters from Churchill, Roosevelt, and other top officials are examined along with a host of secondary sources and even political cartoons as well; in some instances, the Traditionalists are even seen referring to each other's works. But while all this may seem like very impressive research, the fact of the matter is that the information being conveyed is one-sided. Very rarely do one of these men incorporate Russian resources to fit their arguments. In McNeill's 789 page book, it is hard to find more than 2 Russian sources; One comes from Voznesensky, the Soviet economic planner, and the from other Colonel Kalinov. Both are used to cite a claim of the inaccuracy of Soviet economic reports. However, the overall confidentiality

of the USSR must be taken into consideration as well, so it could very well be that circumstances did not make for a balanced analysis. A few of these men like George F. Kennan and Herbert Feis, also started their careers not as historians but as government officials. While this was certainly helpful in obtaining the amount of resources to form their arguments, it also prevented an objective view of events to be communicated to the American public. In an atmosphere built upon suspicion and staunch patriotism, the Traditionalist theory worked very well almost as another source of war propaganda.

Eventually, however, that suspicion grew into understanding and patriotism dismembered itself to form instead the basis for worldwide unity, love, and peace. The Social Revolution of the 1960s and 1970s brought with it the spark that would fuel a whole new Cold War perspective. The Revisionist theory of Cold War origins was introduced in 1959 by William Appleman Williams' *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy* and stands as a direct counterargument to the Orthodox explanation. In his groundbreaking book, Williams performs a re-examination of American foreign policy since the supposed "Crisis of 1890" whereby it was assumed that the American frontier had come to an end and so in order to "sustain their freedom and prosperity", America adopted the Open Door Policy aimed at overseas economic expansion.<sup>27</sup> In doing so, Williams becomes the first to point out the hypocrisy which surrounds the cherished American identity as the ultimate defender for freedom and righteousness. Contrary to its anti-imperialist stance, he argues that America's actions abroad have come to resemble those of a "secular and missionary empire".<sup>28</sup> Further, America's encouragement for

---

<sup>27</sup> William Appleman Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy*, (New York: The World Publishing Company, 1959), 26.

<sup>28</sup> Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy*, 47.

self-determination, propagated by former President Wilson after the Great War, is but a hoax designed to further and protect American business interests. Williams asserts, “The crucial point is this: the idea that other people ought to copy America contradicts the humanitarian urge to help them and the idea that they have the right to make such key decisions for themselves”. In other words, “The American way of doing things simply does not work for all people”, and to force American ideals and institutions on peoples of other nations and cultures is not only degrading to those people but violates the very notion of self-determination which the United States claims to support, making them no better than the Soviet Union whose similar actions they condemn and ridicule. <sup>29</sup>

Williams’ main argument however, centers around the goals associated with the Open Door Policy in which all of America’s dissimulation are seen to be melded together. By his rather thorough examination of American foreign policy as has been executed since 1890, Williams is able to describe nature of the Open Door (or Good Neighbor Policy) as being “infused with the rhetoric of America’s mission to defend and extend democracy, but its context was defined by the immediate and specific needs of American businessmen.”<sup>30</sup> On the proposition that “political line-up followed economic lineup”, attempts to secure democracy wherever possible throughout the world would allow for the elimination of trade and financial barriers, thus generating a degree of economic power to America which would undoubtedly prove beneficial in domestic recovery but also aid in “overcoming competitors and wrong-headed revolutionaries and bestow prosperity and democracy on the entire world.”<sup>31</sup> During the

---

<sup>29</sup> Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy*, 14.

<sup>30</sup> Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy*, 127.

<sup>31</sup> Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy*, 120.

presidency of Franklin D. Roosevelt, in which he faced not only the threat of war but also the need for economic recovery brought on by the Great Depression, this sense of mission to extend the Open Door Policy took on a more forceful and expansive tone”, influencing much of Roosevelt’s foreign policy plans. For example, the United States’ official recognition of the Soviet Union in 1933 along with the generous Lend-Lease conditions allowed to Russia certainly reflected hope in a postwar economic partnership with even the possibility of Russia converting into a democracy like the United States.<sup>32</sup> When suspicion arose at the end of the war toward such a reality, the newly inaugurated Truman administration shifted their policies and began to view the Soviet Union as an economic rival. Hence, Williams essentially concludes that it was the aggressive nature of American foreign policy after World War II that forced Russia to act defensively in building up spheres of influence in order to safeguard Soviet interests.

American activity in Vietnam during the 1960s served as the ultimate stimulus for the production of additional Revisionist works regarding the origins of the Cold War. Though the government advertised the fighting as a necessary evil in order to prevent the spread of Communism, many Americans regarded the war in Vietnam as an imperialistic example of unnecessary meddling into foreign lands and cultures; the perfect backdrop for Williams’ fresh view of an American empire as it underlined American insincerity in international affairs. Joyce and Gabriel Kolko’s book *The Limits of Power*, emerges as one of the most well researched examples of Revisionist theory. Like Williams, their book also investigates American foreign policy, though in a much narrower time frame, covering only the postwar years from 1945-1952 when the Cold War is essentially in its infancy. The Kolkos’ waste no time in asserting their

---

<sup>32</sup> Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy*, 125.

belief that “The United States’ ultimate objective at the end of World War II was both to sustain and to reform world capitalism.”<sup>33</sup> By the end of World War II America, compared to the rest of the world, had emerged virtually unscathed from the horrors of war. The United States was the strongest nation on the globe and only continuing to prosper. Fully confident in this newfound status, American leaders took it upon themselves to rebuild the rest of the world in their image. The Kolkos follow Williams’ emphasis on the Open Door Policy which, after World War II, was especially heightened given the opportunities which arose from a war-torn Europe. The need to reconstruct “prewar world capitalism-to the elimination of trade and financial barriers, exclusive trading blocs, and restrictive policies of every sort” so that American business could not only operate but flourish, put them in direct opposition to leftist political movements which were spreading throughout Europe.<sup>34</sup> And since “The Left and Russia appeared as synonymous in America’s litany”, it was only inevitable given the idealistic aims of an American postwar peace that a cold war should begin between the two powers.<sup>35</sup>

It was also clear to the Americans that economic stability in Europe required a political prerequisite-Democracy. In rebuilding Germany and Western Europe, America unfairly asserted itself into the elections of other countries to ensure the election of democratic leaders who would implement trading policies to match those of the United States. The Marshall Plan and Truman Doctrines were yet another example of “enlightened self-interest...and part of an effort to forestall Communist penetration by raising the living standards...in Europe, and to reestablish

---

<sup>33</sup> Joyce Kolko and Gabriel Kolko, *The Limits of Power: The World and the United States Foreign Policy 1945-1952*, 1st Ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), 11.

<sup>34</sup> Kolko, *The Limits of Power*, 12.

<sup>35</sup> Kolko, *The Limits of Power*, 4.

normal trading patterns through which the whole world would realize prosperity and peace.”<sup>36</sup> It was these plans for worldwide peace and prosperity, founded on the assumption that the United States could easily “limit the independence and development” of countries whose policies would otherwise “conflict with the interests of American capitalism”, that drove American foreign policy in these years that the Kolkos hold to be unrealistic and naive.<sup>37</sup>

The Kolkos emphasize this naivety by providing insight into the Russian perspectives on power at the time. Though it was true “Russian leaders talked of surpassing the United States in output and per capita consumption...such promises remained in the realm of useful fantasy.”<sup>38</sup> There was no doubt that the “immense material and military lead of the United States over Russia in 1949” existed.<sup>39</sup> Proper governmental investigation into Soviet fiscal forms would have revealed an empty threat. Rather, the Soviets desired economic stability as a signifier of the “precondition of internal stability and ultimately, international security” which the Soviets so desperately believed they needed.<sup>40</sup> In their defense of Russia, the Kolkos explain that the “dominant theme in Soviet proclamations in the three years after the war was the possibility and likelihood of coexistence between Russia and the West” and that the danger of war was unreal...for any future conflicts would be between only capitalist nations.”<sup>41</sup> Thereby, the Kolkos remove any former blame placed on Russia for the start of the Cold War, shifting blame instead on American foreign policy clouded by economic self-interest.

---

<sup>36</sup> Kolko, *The Limits of Power*, 359.

<sup>37</sup> Kolko, *The Limits of Power*, 2.

<sup>38</sup> Kolko, *The Limits of Power*, 54.

<sup>39</sup> Kolko, *The Limits of Power*, 54.

<sup>40</sup> Kolko, *The Limits of Power*, 54.

<sup>41</sup> Kolko, *The Limits of Power*, 56-57.

Though an economic approach to American foreign policy seems to be the trademark of Revisionist theory, not all works are limited to this field. Walter La Feber is perhaps one of the greatest Revisionist historians of the twentieth century. And though he too realizes the importance of the Open Door Policy as a central feature of American foreign policy, his main argument concerns the expansionist desires of both Russia and America throughout their respective histories. LaFeber takes note of the ideological and governmental differences which had always separated the two countries but he claims that these differences only exaggerated the principle source of conflict, which relates back to the fact that Russia and the United States were expanding world powers. It was the way in which each sought to achieve its own sense of aggrandizement that since 1890, pushed them towards confrontation. As has already been discussed by prior Revisionists, 1890 marks a great change in American foreign policy with the adoption of the Open Door Policy which placed emphasis on the extension of overseas markets. Russia, on the other hand, “developed an empire that was more political than commercial” and often “tried to control it...by closing the markets to foreign businessmen”.<sup>42</sup> The outcome is a battle between Open Door and Closed Door policies; a battle which inescapably culminates in a stalemate when the Open Door meets the Iron Curtain. It was precisely from this state of affairs that the Cold War was bound to emerge after Europe had been decimated by World War II. Stalin however, remained confident in the continuation of the wartime alliance. La Feber repudiates the notion that Stalin was a “paranoid and mentally ill” man whose inconsistent policies brought the world into a whole different form of warfare.<sup>43</sup> He believes “his foreign

---

<sup>42</sup> Walter LaFeber, *America, Russia and the Cold War 1945-1992*, (New York: McGraw Hill, 1993), 2.

<sup>43</sup> La Feber, *America, Russia and the Cold War*, 20.

policy displayed a realism, a careful calculation of forces and a diplomatic finesse...Stalin's priority was not world revolution but, once again, Russian security and his own personal power."

<sup>44</sup> His policy then, was consistent with his goals, which the West, having different aims, could not understand or did not try to understand. Rather it is Western policy that should be given a further critique. La Feber argues that while "Stalin's policies were brutally consistent, Truman's were confused."<sup>45</sup> He states the obvious example of "the United States, opposed to a sphere of interest in Europe yet strengthening its own sphere in the Western Hemisphere."<sup>46</sup> Such instability manifested itself in the "thousands of troops which had poured into Russia between 1917 and 1920...renewed on promises about the second front, and in 1945 tried to penetrate areas Stalin deemed crucial to Soviet security."<sup>47</sup> For these reasons and more, the Soviets were right to be suspicious of the West. "They were realistic, not paranoid."<sup>48</sup> So again, it seemed to be the obstinacy Western Powers, namely that of the U.S. whose persistent "attempts to open Eastern Europe rekindled earlier fears" which once again, forced the separation of Russia and the United States. <sup>49</sup>

If one is to talk about the leadership of Stalin when referring to the origins of the Cold War then, it seems only appropriate that an examination of Franklin D. Roosevelt should also exist. Amos Perlmutter was a professor of political science at the American University in Washington D.C. and has written perhaps the best critical account of Roosevelt's foreign policy

---

<sup>44</sup> La Feber, *America, Russia and the Cold War*, 21.

<sup>45</sup> La Feber, *America, Russia and the Cold War*, 22.

<sup>46</sup> La Feber, *America, Russia and the Cold War*, 22.

<sup>47</sup> La Feber, *America, Russia and the Cold War*, 21.

<sup>48</sup> La Feber, *America, Russia and the Cold War*, 21.

<sup>49</sup> La Feber, *America, Russia, and the Cold War*, 18.

actions in the events preceding the end of World War II from 1943-1945. In his book, *FDR and Stalin: A Not so Grand Alliance*, Perlmutter coolly devalues the legacy of former president Roosevelt who has been hailed by generations of patriots as the champion of democracy. Rather, in a detailed analysis of his diplomatic policy, especially in regards to Russia, towards the end of the war Roosevelt-“the great war leader” is given “full and direct responsibility for America’s diplomatic failures during World War II.”<sup>50</sup> He mocks the generous conditions of the Lend-Lease contract to Russia, claiming it was “not foreign policy” as much as an agreement cast in the hope of “good faith” which ultimately backfired creating in the mind of the Soviets a weak image of American statesmanship.<sup>51</sup> He debunks the argument that FDR was considering using Lend-Lease as a source of economic leverage against the Soviets, stating “nothing the president said or did supports this argument...not even the monopoly over the atomic bomb”.<sup>52</sup> He faults Roosevelt for going back on his promise to open up a second front, believing that “...it gave Stalin propaganda opportunities in the Soviet Union...” since it fed into fears of capitalist treachery. Perlmutter views Roosevelt’s efforts to form an effective foreign policy as based solely on the principle of appeasement.<sup>53</sup> So focused on his own goals for a peaceful postwar partnership with Soviet Russia, Roosevelt more often made allowances for examples of unsettling Soviet activity (I.e. Invasion of Finland, Nazi-Soviet Non Aggression Pact, Purges...) and above all, in doing so failed to recognize Stalin’s true intentions as they were presented at

---

<sup>50</sup> Amos Perlmutter, *FDR & Stalin: A Not So Grand Alliance 1943-1945*, (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1993), 217.

<sup>51</sup> Perlmutter, *FDR & Stalin*, 16.

<sup>52</sup> Perlmutter, *FDR & Stalin*, 16.

<sup>53</sup> Perlmutter, *FDR & Stalin*, 101.

Yalta. This grave misunderstanding is exemplified in Roosevelt's concessions to Stalin over the fates of Poland, Germany and the Far East, which continue to be criticized by many Revisionists. Under the guidance of President Roosevelt, "The United States was concerned primarily with lofty goals, not balance-of-power issues" and so it would seem that in an ironic twist, the idealism of Roosevelt failed miserably in preparing the way for a peaceful postwar world.<sup>54</sup>

A final topic which should be considered when dealing with Revisionist studies of the origins of the Cold War is the Atomic Bomb. Nearly every Revisionist touches on this controversial subject, but none so much as historian Gar Alperovitz. His book, *Atomic Diplomacy: Hiroshima and Potsdam: The Use of the Atomic Bomb and the American Confrontation with the Soviet Power*, as can be inferred by the title focuses on the usage of the Atomic Bomb as a source of military leverage against the Soviet Union. The time period is very narrow, covering the most pivotal weeks in the summer of 1945, prior to the convening of the Potsdam Conference. By employing a fantastic amount of primary sources, Alperovitz is able to assert his view that the deployment of the Atomic Bombs over Japan were first and foremost intended to be a show of American diplomatic strength directed towards Russia; meaning, they were not necessary to defeat the Japanese Imperial Army. This decision was the result of a general consensus among government elites in the newly inaugurated Truman administration who wished to get tough with Russia, and so reverse the image of American weakness which had been demonstrated by Roosevelt's overly generous policies. Records by Henry Stimson, U.S. Secretary of War, to President Truman in the weeks before the Potsdam Conference, urge him to consider "this highly secret matter...which has such a bearing on our present foreign relations",

---

<sup>54</sup> Perlmutter, *FDR & Stalin*, 178.

for the author seem to be indicative of the fact that President Truman delayed the Potsdam Conference until the first test of the Atomic Bomb proved successful.<sup>55</sup> Truman, who had already planned on renegotiating Roosevelt's promises made at Yalta, may have wanted the backing of so deadly a weapon in order to increase his own confidence in the United States' diplomatic position. The overall effectiveness of this so-called "Atomic Diplomacy" could of course, be debated but for Alperovitz, the flaunting of the Atomic Bomb intensified Russian efforts for security, and triggered responses that could only be understood in a Cold War context.

Hopefully, the examples provided have offered a clear insight into the postulations of Revisionist interpretations regarding Cold War origins. Still, to sum up in a rather neatly fashion, Revisionist arguments contain the following major components which should all be regarded as the antithesis to Traditionalist thinking:

1. Russia is not solely responsible for the start of the Cold War.
2. The United States was not passive but instead pursued and more often imposed its own economic and ideological agenda in its dealings with other nations.
3. The mission, adopted by the U.S., to spread democracy and encourage self-determination for all peoples is therefore, adjudged to be hypocritical based on the ulterior motives above mentioned.
4. The Atomic Bomb continues to be viewed as a source of military leverage against the Soviets which forced them to enact defensive foreign policy measures in order to secure their security, which was now even more threatened.

---

<sup>55</sup> Gar Alperovitz, *Atomic Diplomacy: Hiroshima and Potsdam: The Use of the Atomic Bomb and the Confrontation with the Soviet Power*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1965), 36.

5. The Roosevelt and Truman administrations played a critical role in the commencement of Cold War affairs. Their policies, though entirely different, failed to promote a peaceful postwar partnership with the Soviet Union.

In evaluating these points, from both a professional and personal standpoint, the Revisionist theory does seem most sensible. First of all, unlike contributors to the Traditionalist school of interpretation, the Revisionist writers mentioned here are all historians. This means that there is a greater amount of objectivity presented in their theories which is essential to the proper study of history. Secondly, there exists a temporal gap which undoubtedly also bears an influence on the open-mindedness proffered in these texts since time has cooled the passions evoked by World War II, most especially that of American patriotism so markedly catered to in Orthodox interpretations. Again, the ability to conduct a retrospective analysis of events is an extremely important interpretive tool. Now this same time gap which certainly proves beneficial in one regard, may also fall to victim to criticism since it can be argued that the theories put forward by Revisionists are no less influenced by the events occurring in their own time than were those of the Traditionalists. Unfortunately, this is one of the plights associated with studying history. The historian can never separate his/herself from the influence of contemporary events. Others may also argue that Revisionist interpretations are too narrow; focusing for the most part on economics. Certainly, this is a major element of Revisionist thought and deservedly so, since these historians have employed a tremendous deal of sources to support their theories. Yet, our breakdown of examples should reveal a certain amount of diversity that does surely exist in Revisionist thought. Lastly, since it has already been hinted upon, it is important to stress the variety of sources used by the Revisionist school. These men and women have not only incorporated the standard primary and secondary U.S. based sources into their works, such as the

diaries of Henry Stimson and General Leahy, but they have made extraordinary efforts to utilize Soviet documents as well. Amos Perlmutter, in his bibliography, makes note of the fact that he “...is the first Western scholar to examine previously unpublished Soviet Foreign Ministry Archives”.<sup>56</sup> Correspondence and speeches by Joseph Stalin and other Soviets are finally brought to light to unveil the truth that lay hidden behind the Iron Curtain. Even a few secondary Russian sources are referred to, despite the language barrier. Clearly, the passage of time was necessary for such developments in analysis to take place, though one ought to wonder if and how such documentation would’ve been used if available prior. Nonetheless, the fact that such materials were used serves as a testimony to the ongoing search for a balanced truth; and that should be the supreme goal of historical analysis.

Still for others, the perceived inadequacies present in the Revisionist school were simply not the desired route to achieving this balanced truth. This is where the Post-Revisionists make their mark. Perhaps one of the most stinging critiques of the Revisionist school is that it sends an un-American message about the United States by claiming, foremost that America is an empire. What’s more, they assert this empire is based on commercial interests and only uses democratic rhetoric as a pretext to interfere in foreign affairs. One of the leading Post-Revisionists, Geir Lundestad, fights this assumption declaring in a very Traditionalist light that America’s interference abroad was sought after by European countries. In his article, *Empire by Invitation*, Lundestad retains the Revisionist claim that the U.S. did emerge from World War II as the strongest power on the globe. With Europe weakened and devastated America, like Russia, saw an opportunity on which to capitalize. However, unlike Russia, who had to employ force in order to dominate parts of Europe so that it could compete with the U.S. as a world power; the U.S.

---

<sup>56</sup>Perlmutter, *FDR & Stalin*, 300.

was asked to provide their aid in European countries. The type of aid varied of course, but there can be no doubt that “There was desperate need for economic assistance in Europe and there was only major source-The U.S.”<sup>57</sup> Likewise, defense proved a dire issue in the war-torn countries of Europe, many of whom were still struggling against a combination of both internal and external foes. Take for example, Italy’s communist sector that threatened to seize power or the poor countries of Eastern Europe desperately trying to hold on to their independence in the face of Communist aggression. Finally he admits that some countries simply “admired what the U.S. stood for”.<sup>58</sup> And while he recognizes the economic gains supplied to the U.S. as a result of their interference (a Revisionist focus) such as the establishment of several World Banks, Lundestad believes that “they were not really meant to promote American objectives but world economic progress and even peace.”<sup>59</sup> It was inevitable given the political, military and economic positions of the United States after the war, that it should expand. But the extension of capitalism and of a market were certainly ulterior motives, that came about by circumstance. “America was pure and it was powerful” and this fact certainly threatened the Soviet Union who also sought to fill the European vacuum.<sup>60</sup>

Martin McCauley also seeks to evaluate the inevitability of the Cold War conflict. In his book, *The Origins of the Cold War*, McCauley also makes mention of the vacuum left in Europe and believes it would have been unavoidable for “the two countries who contributed most to the defeat of the Axis powers” to assert their newfound global standings and attempt to “reshape the

---

<sup>57</sup> Geir Lundestad, “Empire by Invitation?” *Journal of Peace Research* 23, no.3, (1986): 269.

<sup>58</sup> Lundestad, “Empire by Invitation”, 268.

<sup>59</sup> Lundestad, “Empire by Invitation”, 265.

<sup>60</sup> Lundestad, “Empire by Invitation”, 265.

political configuration” of the world.<sup>61</sup> Like most Post-Revisionists, McCauley steers away from placing a certain amount of blame on one party, as he evaluates the conditions on both sides which gave rise to the Cold War. The leading source of conflict, as he sees it, is the amount of misunderstanding which took place between the years of 1941-1949. These misunderstandings were the product of very different histories as well as ideologies. Roosevelt’s policies were clouded by Wilsonian ethics, which boosted the need to spread democracy and ensure open markets. Stalin’s policy reasoning was very different, focusing on the security of Russia, a concern which had deep roots in Communist ideology and in Russia’s history of invasion. The failure to identify these differences led to a build-up of misconceptions and the ultimate break in a postwar partnership. Despite such misconceptions and clouded visions for a postwar peace, McCauley regards Roosevelt as a “skilled expositor” who made great efforts to work with Stalin and ease any inkling of Soviet fear of the West.<sup>62</sup> Though his generous policies toward Russia may have seemed promising for a time, Roosevelt’s death signified a turning point in American-Soviet relations. Truman’s get tough policy actions would only increase the nature of Soviet misconceptions, fostering a “Western fear of the Soviet Union” which would determine the future of America’s foreign policy for the next half a century.<sup>63</sup>

John Lewis Gaddis also emphasizes this Western fear in his Post-Revisionist analysis as one of many principal causes of the Cold War. Gaddis is considered the “father of post-revisionism” for his extensive and well-researched synthesis of events that precipitated the Cold War in his book, *The United States and the Origins of the Cold War 1941-1947*. Here he makes

---

<sup>61</sup>Martin McCauley, *The Origins of the Cold War 1941-1949*, (London: Pearson and Longman,2003), 98.

<sup>62</sup> McCauley, *The Origins of the Cold War*, 99.

<sup>63</sup> McCauley, *The Origins of the Cold War*, 103.

an effort to understand the forces which moved American foreign policy during these most critical years. Rebutting the narrow Revisionist focus on economic considerations, Gaddis makes it clear that “many other forces-domestic policies, bureaucratic inertia, quirks of personality, perceptions, accurate or inaccurate, of Soviet intentions-also affected the actions of Washington officials.”<sup>64</sup> Like other Post-Revisionists of his time, he stresses the influence of the past on what was then, modern-day policy making. For the United States, the lessons of World War I were clear: in order to avoid the breakout of another world war Roosevelt had to make right all of Wilson’s mistakes. The principles of self-determination had to be spread and the United Nations needed to be a success in order to promise a sense of postwar security. Unconditional surrender was sought to eliminate the seeds of envy and vengeance which had erupted into World War II. And “American leaders regarded reconstruction of the world’s economy as important a goal as self-determination” since “to them, the coincidence of world depression with the rise of dictators seemed more than accidental.”<sup>65</sup> Russia’s history of invasion, especially from the West, formulated a much different set of foreign policy goals. The top priority was to “keep Russia strong” by building a sphere of influence in its neighboring territory.<sup>66</sup> However, the apparent commitment to Communist ideology manifested significantly in the paranoid personality of Stalin led “Washington policy-makers to mistake Stalin’s determination...for Russian security through spheres of influence for a renewed effort to spread communism.”<sup>67</sup> This is just one of several explicit gaps between Russia and the United States. Language and culture among other

---

<sup>64</sup> John Lewis Gaddis, *The United States and the Origins of the Cold War 1941-47*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972), viii.

<sup>65</sup> Gaddis, *The United States and the Origins of the Cold War*, 18.

<sup>66</sup> Gaddis, *The United States and the Origins of the Cold War*, 354.

<sup>67</sup> Gaddis, *The United States and the Origins of the Cold War*, 355.

things, enhanced the ideological separation between the two countries. Roosevelt's "peculiar mixture of naivety and idealism" led him to make some of the most criticized decisions regarding the opening of the second front, Yalta, the Polish-Question and the overall secret of the atomic bomb. So fixated on America's postwar agenda he failed to fully reconcile the differences that separated himself from Stalin and Russia's own plans for a postwar world. After focusing on the issue of Cold War from nearly every point of internal and external development, Gaddis concludes that "though both superpowers sought peace", the very different way in which each partner went about securing this peace-obviously impacted by a host of agents-created instead the path to a Cold War.<sup>68</sup>

One thing that Gaddis laments all throughout his writing is the lack of information regarding the workings of the Soviet government which undoubtedly makes any genuine investigation into the Origins of the Cold War difficult. However, with the collapse of the Cold War, a great number of Soviet materials were unveiled. These declassified documents would prove invaluable to a current understanding of the Cold War. Ralph Levering is a recently retired professor of U.S. diplomatic history from Davidson College. In his book published in 2002 entitled *Debating the Origins of the Cold War: American and Russian Perspectives*, he becomes one of the first American historians to attempt to provide a clear and impartial amalgam of both American and Russian documents in evaluating the origins of the Cold War. Not surprisingly, he co-authors this book with C. Earl Edmonson and two Russian historians Vladimir Pechatnov and Verena Botzenhart-Viehe. The book is neatly divided into two sections, as can be inferred from the title: American Perspective and Russian Perspective. As is quite typical of the American Perspective, Levering expounds the source of un-easy Soviet-American relations with the year

---

<sup>68</sup> Gaddis, *The United States and the Origins of the Cold War*, 361.

1917. World War I was at its end, and the Wilsonian image of a free and democratic peace became challenged by Bolshevik revolutionaries who wished to spread communism and so, overthrow free capitalist nations around the world. Evidently, this triggered a rise in American animosity felt towards Russia and “domestic communists and their sympathizers” which would remain and define future perceptions of Russian actions, most especially throughout the years of World War II.<sup>69</sup> In a way that is very fitting to Levering’s method of analysis, he goes on to examine through the use of Gallup polls etc. the ups and downs of American sentiment towards Russian actions. It is a very volatile ride. Prior to 1942, one could say that American attitude toward Russia was extremely negative. The “Soviet attack on poor little Finland” and the signing of the nonaggression pact outraged many Americans who now categorized Russia as being no better than one of Hitler’s allies.<sup>70</sup> “The pact removed all doubt that there is any real difference between Communism and Fascism.”<sup>71</sup> However, this changed when between 1942-1944 as Russia was deeply embroiled in the fight against Germany, American opinion polls showed an “overall trend of positive responses” perhaps since by fighting Germany, Russia proved its allegiance to the principles of the Grand Alliance.<sup>72</sup> While Levering’s emphasis on popular culture and opinion polls allows for a unique and deeper insight into the long-held animosities “that developed so swiftly after the wartime alliance with Russia had ended” in essence, stating that any desire to retain such a pact was utterly unfounded; he does touch on previously held

---

<sup>69</sup> Ralph Levering et al., *Debating the Origins of the Cold War: American and Russian Perspectives*, (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2002), 2.

<sup>70</sup> Ralph Levering et al., *Debating the Origins of the Cold War*, 12.

<sup>71</sup> Ralph Levering et al., *Debating the Origins of the Cold War*, 11.

<sup>72</sup> Ralph Levering et al., *Debating the Origins of the Cold War*, 19.

revisionist theory in his argument as well which classifies his work as Post-Revisionist. He very clearly states that “the economic interpretation’s great flaw, is that it is far too narrow and monocausal. Most Americans wanted friendly, democratic nations overseas not only for economic reasons but for political and strategic ones as well.”<sup>73</sup> He also backs up Lundestad’s theory of an empire by invitation by stating “Some individual Western occupiers acted improperly but in the main west Europeans welcomed the U.S. and British presence.”<sup>74</sup> Though he really doesn’t provide much analysis to support these statements.

As for the Russian perspective, again the central issues revolve around the need for Russian security. Clearly, this need arose from Leninist ideology but also from “having gone through the horrendous sufferings”, the Soviet people wanted nothing more than peace, security and relief. Despite such wartime hardships, Russia emerged from the “test of withstanding a titanic war and proved its ability to concentrate resources and maintain internal discipline.”<sup>75</sup> Still, the fact that they had been invaded and came so close to defeat at the hands of a much smaller nation was cause for alarm. Their foreign policy was based upon “Barbarossa Syndrome.”<sup>76</sup> In a manner from different from that of the American perspective, he analyzes Soviet government attitudes toward American behavior whose actions were more often seen as a breach in Russia’s quest to build-up security. The policy shift when Truman came to office, the confusion over Lend-Lend deliveries, the Potsdam Conference and the unleashing of the Atomic Bomb all confirmed Stalin’s prior misgivings about the new president. No longer was there seen

---

<sup>73</sup> Ralph Levering et al., *Debating the Origins of the Cold War*, 25.

<sup>74</sup> Ralph Levering et al., *Debating the Origins of the Cold War*, 25.

<sup>75</sup> Ralph Levering et al., *Debating the Origins of the Cold War*, 86-87.

<sup>76</sup> Ralph Levering et al., *Debating the Origins of the Cold War*, 89.

any attempt to foster a friendly partnership between the two nations. The Lend-Lease holdout on Russia reawakened the fear of a capitalist encirclement and the flaunting of the Atomic Bomb reversed the idea of “the United States as a remote and relatively harmless giant that would be unable to present a real threat to Soviet security” which Roosevelt had worked so hard to promote.<sup>77</sup> He recognizes the classic claim that ideology guided Soviet foreign decisions but defends the notion of gaining security through expansion as “hardly new” and believes that in the Soviet case, “leaders could have hardly done other than they did in creating their Cold War empire.”<sup>78</sup>

This sums up Post-Revisionist examples pertaining to the Cold War. As should have been evident the key points to this school are as follows:

1. Though recognizing the economic gains secured through American interference and expansion, the need to expand participants in the Open Door Policy was not the only cause of the Cold War.
2. The Cold War consists of many domestic and external factors; with particular emphasis on the impact of the past in guiding foreign policy for each.
3. The United States was a defensive empire.
4. Though ideology played a significant role in both Soviet and American policies, the primary reason that pitted Russia against America was the desire of both countries to fill the vacuum in Europe.

---

<sup>77</sup> Ralph Levering et al., *Debating the Origins of the Cold War*, 105.

<sup>78</sup> Ralph Levering et al., *Debating the Origins of the Cold War*, 150.

Though Post-Revisionist theories do succeed in broadening one's outlook on the origins of the Cold War through its multi-faceted approach, it is often seen as a "toothless revisionism" because in adopting multiple standpoints and refusing to cast blame, it makes it easy to lose oneself in the facts. The answer becomes simply whatever one wants it to be, and so a lack of substance permeates these reports. This fact can even be stated outright for example, in Levering's book he encourages his readers "to undertake further study...and not only to weigh the perspectives offered in this book."<sup>79</sup> This may be a dangerous invitation, promising a wealth of rather subjective and impartial scholarship which ceases to make any new contribution to the topic. However, despite its shaky credibility, Post-Revisionist theory without a doubt, offers an unbiased evaluation of events as has never before been seen (and perhaps a bit too unbiased). The school also begins to make great use of declassified Soviet documents and other sources of information found here in the United States, such as those offered by popular magazines and opinion polls which will lead the way into a whole new category of Cold War theory.

The New Cold War Revisionist group represents the final and most recent area of Cold War scholarship. These writers focus mainly on the role of ideology when studying the causes of the Cold War, placing major emphasis also on the key players in such affairs namely Stalin and his aides, as well as Roosevelt and other officials who were in some way tied to the creation of public opinion. As we have already seen on the American side, there has been significant reasoning in arguing that public opinion certainly had a great impact on foreign policy and relations. The Traditionalist Thomas Bailey was the first in 1950 to utilize such popular resources in his evaluation of the Cold War Origins. Today, Ralph Levering follows his example. Besides his *Debating the Origins of the Cold War*, Levering's book *American Opinion and the*

---

<sup>79</sup> Ralph Levering et al., *Debating the Origins of the Cold War*, 24.

*Russian Alliance 1939-1945* serves as another excellent example of New Cold War writings. He focuses specifically on American popular culture during World War II. This includes not only public opinion polls but a host of newspapers such as the *New York Daily Worker* or *Washington Post*, a series of periodicals including *Commonweal*, *Ladies' Home Journal* and the *Russian Review* as well as radio recordings, interviews, and films popular in the day. By compiling all of these sources, Levering is able to piece together the causes for America's rapidly changing attitude towards the Soviets so necessary for understanding the collapse of a wartime "friendship" which seemed always to be in question. His major points are not unlike anything that has been already alluded to for example, American outrage at the Russian invasion of Finland in 1939 as well as distrust at Russia's signing of the nonaggression pact. However, he does explore other realms of opinion such as religion which he believed had an "all-pervasive influence" on Russian relations.<sup>80</sup> Catholics in particular were so reluctant to support Russia as an ally given the government's atheistic agenda, that in order to help sway public opinion "Roosevelt wrote to Pope Pius XII in hopes of a promise of assistance."<sup>81</sup> However, like Bailey, Levering concludes in a way that mixes Post-Revisionist sympathy with Revisionist thought that "opinion makers and indeed the people themselves shared responsibility for the failure to understand the probable realities of the postwar international order" and while recognizing Roosevelt's many efforts in trying to cultivate a friendship with Russia by reversing public opinion both in and out of the United States, he ultimately "failed in preparing the people for a peaceful postwar world."<sup>82</sup>

---

<sup>80</sup> Ralph Levering, *American Opinion and the Russian Alliance 1939-1945*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1976.), 50.

<sup>81</sup> Levering, *American Opinion and the Russian Alliance*, 51.

<sup>82</sup> Levering, *American Opinion and the Russian Alliance*, 206-207.

Similarly, Professor Benjamin Alpers also experiments on the use of American public opinion in his understanding of the origins of the Cold War in his book *Dictators, Democracy, and American Public Culture: Envisioning the Totalitarian Enemy 1920s-1950s*. Perhaps realizing that American and Russian relations have always been separated by the nature of their governments, Alpers attempts to survey “American understandings of dictatorship” in order to again, better explain the causes for hostility which doomed the Grand Alliance.<sup>83</sup> Though the book is divided into several parts to discuss American attitudes towards other totalitarian leaders (Hitler and Mussolini), he does contribute greatly to the understanding of Soviet American perceptions by raising several interesting points. First, and though it may not come as something new, perceptions experienced constant change during this thirty year period of dictatorship. Though the concept of a totalitarian government had always run contrary to that of the U.S., there were periods when dictatorship did not seem to pose a danger and was so welcomed. He explains how Mussolini’s rise to power gained mostly admiration in the U.S. since it was he “who single-handedly brought order to Italy’s political life.”<sup>84</sup> And as “Mussolini’s prestige rose in the U.S., the American image of the Soviet Union changed as well.”<sup>85</sup> Stalin’s Five-Year Plan was also praised as a way to restore order in the midst of Russia’s “social chaos.”<sup>86</sup> Alpers also analyses a great deal of American film that in some way was influential in conveying an image about Russia. Surprisingly, most movies “celebrated the Russian people” and their heroic fight

---

<sup>83</sup> Benjamin Alpers, *Dictators, Democracy, and American Public Culture: Envisioning the Totalitarian Enemy 1920s-1950s* 1st Ed., (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 13.

<sup>84</sup> Alpers, *Dictators, Democracy, and American Public Culture*, 15.

<sup>85</sup> Alpers, *Dictators, Democracy, and American Public Culture*, 33.

<sup>86</sup> Alpers, *Dictators, Democracy, and American Public Culture*, 32.

against Nazi Germany.<sup>87</sup> The Russians were presented in a manner similar to Americans perhaps in hopes of communicating a sense of oneness between the two nations but despite all this effort, there was always at least one significant divider between them-ideology. And any attempt to reconcile the principles of democracy and communism proved futile.

Quickly, it should go without saying that ideology was a central element in the development of the Cold War. Despite their differences, nearly every school of interpretation has commented on its importance. In still speaking of American ideological works, Naoko Shibusawa's article entitled *Ideology, Culture and the Cold War* deserves some mention for its insightful disclosure of the role played by American ideology. Though most hardcore Americans prefer to think of themselves as being "immune to ideology", and this was certainly the case after World War II, the fact remains that America does hold an ideology in the forms of freedom and democracy.<sup>88</sup> Now perhaps to Americans these are not considered ideologies since from an American view of European events ideology has gone almost hand-in-hand with the danger of revolution and dictatorships, but nonetheless democracy too can be a danger especially when coupled with the notion of American Exceptionalism which for Shibusawa, forms the epitome of American ideology. He explains that throughout American history, the U.S.'s foreign (and domestic) policy actions have always been motivated by that sense of Manifest Destiny; the belief that America "spread the blessings of its liberty...i.e. U.S. liberal economic systems/democratic institutions" to people all over the world.<sup>89</sup> And agreeing with William A. Williams, this is of course, nowhere more apparent than in American postwar actions. Where

---

<sup>87</sup> Alpers, *Dictators, Democracy, and American Public Culture*, 233.

<sup>88</sup> Naoko Shibusawa, "Ideology, Culture, and the Cold War" *The Oxford Handbook of the Cold War*. Edited by Richard H. Immerman and Petra Goedde. (Oxford, U.K., Oxford University Press, 2013), 34.

<sup>89</sup> Shibusawa, "Ideology, Culture, and the Cold War", 40.

contrary to its opposition in forming spheres of influence, the U.S. interfered relentlessly in the affairs of Western Europe as it tried to rebuild itself, thereby consolidating an American presence. America never understood that “what’s best for America has not always been best for most people in America and in the world.”<sup>90</sup> This idealistic vision of American supremacy, which obviously guided Roosevelt (and other American leaders), was just as harmful as they supposed Communism to be in the minds of their Soviet partners.

Finally, perhaps the most impressive contribution to the study of Cold War origins can also be found within the New Cold War Revisionist school. Appearing around the time of the collapse of the Soviet Union, these historians were able to benefit much from an unprecedented volume of declassified Soviet archival materials. Vojtech Mastny is a professor of political science and international relations and considered one of the leading American authorities on Soviet affairs. In his book, *The Cold War and Soviet Insecurity: The Stalin Years*, Mastny attempts to re-evaluate the workings of Soviet foreign policy as it was dictated by Stalin in the years 1947-1953, with the use of such new and precious Russian documents. As can be inferred by the title, Soviet insecurity was a major factor in the carrying out of foreign policy. He explains that since the Soviet state was “created by a minority coup rather than by exertion of popular will, it was always intrinsically insecure.”<sup>91</sup> Stalin’s deep ideological convictions toward Leninist thought increased this sense of insecurity. It becomes clear that he “aimed at ensuring his country’s security at the expense of all others.”<sup>92</sup> And surely, in this “quest for security

---

<sup>90</sup> Shibusawa, “Ideology, Culture and the Cold War”, 44.

<sup>91</sup> Vojtech Mastny, *The Cold War and Soviet Insecurity: The Stalin Years*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 11.

<sup>92</sup> Mastny, *The Cold War and Soviet Insecurity*, 27.

Stalin...was inclined to take greater risks” but still there can be no doubt that Soviet leaders “never wanted to overstep the limits.”<sup>93</sup> The so-called Soviet threat was nearly an empty one since Stalin’s distorted view of the world, “enhanced by ideological preconceptions”, also made him “prone to miscalculations” whether in estimating Soviet strength or the weaknesses of their enemies.<sup>94</sup> Though it has been promulgated by many, Mastny confirms that Stalin “was given to illusions and wishful thinking” and so, was not all that sound in his policies.<sup>95</sup> However, despite the apparent frailty in Russia’s condition, the fear of a Soviet threat in some form persisted and deeply impacted U.S. policymakers. For Mastny, this rather unfounded fear was a result of the “unbridgeable chasm between Stalinist and Western values” which eradicated even the “idea of genuine accommodation” with one another, especially in the case of Russia. Over-all, it was this fear that influenced the actions of both the U.S. and the Soviet Union in the events precipitating the Cold War.<sup>96</sup>

*Inside the Kremlin’s Cold War: From Stalin to Khrushchev* also offers insight into the minds of Soviet policymakers. Russian historians Vladislav Zubok and Constantine Pleshakov claim to be “the first generation schooled under the Soviet system but with some exposure to the West” to write a re-examination of Soviet foreign policy, as prompted by the “new revelations” being disclosed from Soviet and Eastern European archives.<sup>97</sup> They first scrutinize the personality of Stalin, concluding without a doubt that he was deeply moved by Communist

---

<sup>93</sup> Mastny, *The Cold War and Soviet Insecurity*, 191.

<sup>94</sup> Mastny, *The Cold War and Soviet Insecurity*, 191.

<sup>95</sup> Mastny, *The Cold War and Soviet Insecurity*, 193.

<sup>96</sup> Mastny, *The Cold War and Soviet Insecurity*, 194.

<sup>97</sup> Vladislav Zubok and Constantine Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin’s Cold War: From Stalin to Khrushchev*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), xii.

ideology. However, “Stalinism” was a bit different in its aims; focusing more on “building a strong Soviet Union” than spearheading a world revolution of Communism.<sup>98</sup> “Stalin also regarded himself as the heir to the traditional Russian empire” and so, for both these reasons a territorial sphere of influence was majorly important.<sup>99</sup> Again, “Stalin’s deep suspicion of the motives of the Western Allies” played a part in forming a new era in East-West relations.<sup>100</sup> These suspicions only heightened after the death of FDR, whom Stalin had always “accepted as his partner”.<sup>101</sup> Turning to Khrushchev, his governing style was very different from Stalin. He too, was a staunch Communist and bent on hastening a worldwide revolution. Contrary to Stalin’s methods of “careful reflection and calm calculation”, Khrushchev was described as both “fierce and smart, but impulsive and prone to spontaneous reactions, unpredictable for outsiders.”<sup>102</sup> Much of Khrushchev’s policy motives stemmed from his firm belief that the “USSR had been wronged and mistreated by the United States after World War II.” He therefore spent his rule trying to affirm the “Soviets’ rightful place in the world.”<sup>103</sup>

As is evident, the historiography of the Origins of the Cold War is as shifting as East-West relations themselves. The position of the New Cold War Revisionists seems indeed very promising. Certainly, with so much new information being brought out of the archives, especially in Russia, there is a great need for a re-evaluation of events precipitating the Cold

---

<sup>98</sup> Zubok, Vladislav., and Constantine Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin’s Cold War*, 12-13.

<sup>99</sup> Zubok, Vladislav., and Constantine Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin’s Cold War*, 16.

<sup>100</sup> Zubok, Vladislav., and Constantine Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin’s Cold War*, 37.

<sup>101</sup> Zubok, Vladislav., and Constantine Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin’s Cold War*, 39.

<sup>102</sup> Zubok, Vladislav., and Constantine Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin’s Cold War*, 177.

<sup>103</sup> Zubok, Vladislav., and Constantine Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin’s Cold War*, 182.

War. Perhaps surprisingly, it what Soviet authors had to say since much of their work seems to confirm American preconceptions of the Soviet Union. But this is not to say they cast blame on Russia for the start of the Cold War, these authors acknowledge that there were “other culprits in the conflict”, as we have seen, that can not be disregarded. Its emphasis on ideology, as important and undeniable a factor as it may be, may tend to limit its benefits.<sup>104</sup> Nonetheless, it is a very important area to take into consideration since it is symbolic of the new direction of Cold War studies. As one goes on to perform his/her own research on this topic, it is important to always look at your sources such as those discussed not only to get an idea of where there can be room for breakthrough but also to help find more enlightening sources. Hopefully the contributions made by the New Cold War Revisionists underlines the importance of primary sources in developing new kinds of research. Though probably most students are limited to the American mainland, there are a few Russian databases that can be accessed through the internet such as that of the Russian Archives Online. In the United States, perhaps a trip to the U.S. National Archives in Washington D.C. or even to the Library of Congress can help shed light on Soviet-American affairs though probably offering a more Western perspective. Remember not to limit oneself to documents and papers but also to explore film, propaganda posters, and photos which can be found in each of these institutions already mentioned. Lastly, for those interested in public opinion and popular culture, it may be worth checking out the online archives of Public Opinion Quarterly or Ladies’ Home Journal, however, in order to fully access their collections one may need the help of a research librarian.

---

<sup>104</sup> Zubok, Vladislav., and Constantine Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin’s Cold War*, 276.

Again, hopefully this historiography has proven helpful in understanding the various interpretations of the Cold War origins. With our mind now elucidated in such knowledge, may we go on to explore and discover a more perfect picture of the past.