

## **Why the Cold War Worked**

By **Tony Judt**

**We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History Press**

by John Lewis Gaddis

A Council on Foreign Relations Book/ Clarendon Press/Oxford University, 425 pp., \$30.00

**The Cominform: Minutes of the Three Conferences 1947/1948/1949**

edited by Giuliano Procacci

Milan: Fondazione Giangiacomo Feltrinelli, 1,054 pp., L170,000

### **1.**

Postwar London, where I grew up, was a world fueled by coal and driven by steam, where market vendors still used horses, where motor cars were uncommon and supermarkets (and much of what they sell) unknown. In its social geography, its climate and environment, its class relations and political alignments, its industrial trades and its habits of social deference, London in 1950 would have been immediately recognizable to an observer from half a century before. Even the great "socialist" projects of the postwar Labour governments were really the late flowering of the reforming ideas of Edwardian-era Liberals. Much had changed, of course; in Britain as in the rest of Europe war and economic decline had changed the physical and moral landscape. Yet for just that reason the distant past seemed closer and more familiar than ever. In important ways, mid-twentieth-century London was still a late-nineteenth-century city. Even so, the cold war had long since begun.

It is helpful to understand just how different the world was fifty years ago if we are to appreciate a point on which John Gaddis lays much emphasis in his excellent book. The cold war lasted a very long time—forty-three years, from the collapse of postwar negotiations with the USSR in 1947 to the unification of Germany in 1990. That is considerably longer than the interminable wars of the French Revolution and Napoleon, longer than the infamous Thirty Years War of the seventeenth century, and just one year short of the span of time separating, say, the death of Thomas Jefferson from the birth of Lenin.

In 1951, at the height of the Korean War, Europe was governed by men from a very different age: the British prime minister, Winston Churchill, and the German chancellor, Konrad Adenauer, had both been born shortly after the first unification of Germany under Bismarck's Prussia (in 1874 and 1876 respectively); and Bismarck was still the dominant figure on the international diplomatic scene when they first took cognizance of public

affairs. Even their "younger" contemporaries, like the Italian Christian Democratic leader Alcide de Gasperi or Josef Stalin himself, had come to maturity a decade before the outbreak of the First World War, and their views on politics and especially on international relations had been forged by the configurations and conflicts of an earlier time. Before we too readily conflate the cold war with the dilemmas of the post-atomic age, we should keep in mind that the men who first fought it could not help but see the world through a very different lens.

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His sensitivity to this consideration is one of the many qualities of Gaddis's book, which is not so much a history of the cold war as a series of essays, in loosely chronological order, on the major themes and crises that marked it—the division of Europe, the German question, conflicts in Asia, the paradoxes of nuclear strategy, and so forth. Gaddis writes clearly, takes a common-sense and mostly unpolemical approach to highly contested and volatile debates, and has an impressive knowledge of the English-language secondary literature on a daunting range of topics. He has already written four full-length studies of the cold war era, all drawing on his expertise in the history of US foreign policy.<sup>[1]</sup> But in this book he has tried to bring together the copious body of material that has been discovered since in the Soviet and East European archives, as well as revelations from recently released US sources, and to weave them all into a general interpretation covering the present state of our knowledge.

Hence the perhaps unfortunate title of the book. Correctly inflected, with the emphasis on now, it suggests that Gaddis is summarizing the present state of our knowledge of the history of the last fifty years, on the understanding that things may look different when we learn more. But readers, like some reviewers, may be tempted to read it as an assertion of confident finality: we now know what happened and why. That would be a pity, for Gaddis is entirely aware of the danger of overestimating the knowledge and understanding to be gained from newly opened archives, however promising they may appear. An "archive," after all, whether it contains the minutes of Communist Party discussions, the intercepted transmissions of foreign governments, reports from spies, or even a police list of informers and "collaborators," is not a fount of truth. The motives and goals of those creating the documents, the limits of their own knowledge, the incorporation of gossip or flattery into a report for someone senior, the distortions of ideology or prejudice have all to be taken into account.

Even if we could somehow be assured of both the truth and the significance of a given source, no document can ever surface that will finally settle a major historical controversy—the archives of eighteenth-century France, for example, have been open for many generations now without putting an end to acrimonious historiographical debates over the origins and meaning of the French Revolution. In the case of the cold war we do not even know for certain what documentary materials we still lack (from both sides), though the inaccessibility of the archives of the President of the Russian Federation certainly means that historians remain unable to describe Soviet-era decisions or decision-taking at the highest level.<sup>[2]</sup> For all these reasons caution is required. The

selective and politically motivated release of archives and personal files in former Communist countries has done much harm; the publication (especially in France) of popular histories that ransack newly accessible Soviet and East European archives to "reveal" past traitors has brought some discredit upon the whole enterprise.<sup>[3]</sup>

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Gaddis is cautious. He makes full use of the work done by scholars who have used the Russian Center for the Conservation and Study of Records for Modern History and of the *Bulletin of the Cold War International History Project*, the periodical in which much of the newly researched material is discussed. But he uses this material mostly for illustrative purposes, and only rarely—as in the case of Kim Il Sung's correspondence with Stalin in 1950—to stake a firm interpretive claim: he concludes that Stalin was at first reluctant to back Kim's aggressive designs, and only agreed to support him once it was clear that the initiative and responsibility would rest with the Chinese.

Like the specialists whose work he uses, he recognizes that however interesting the new materials, they are not telling us things about which we were utterly ignorant. Thanks to the selective documentation published by the Yugoslavs during their quarrel with Stalin, for example, or material released during brief moments of "reform Communism" in Poland (in 1956) and Czechoslovakia (in 1968), the internal history of decisions and conflicts within the Soviet bloc has never been a complete blank.

Indeed, in the light of the new information now being published and debated, it is striking how much we already "knew." When we take account of the memoirs of participants from all sides, partial primary documentation, perceptive first-hand observation, and discriminating historical analysis, the history of the cold war has been available to us all along. In the words of two scholars who have made copious use of the new primary documentation, it now seems clear that "Western 'Cold War' historiography of Soviet domination of [Eastern Europe] was fundamentally on target."<sup>[4]</sup> The failure of some Western politicians (and scholars) to grasp the nature of the cold war, especially in its early days, derived less from a shortage of documentation than from a failure of imagination. In George Kennan's words, "Our national leaders in Washington had no idea at all, and would probably have been incapable of imagining, what a Soviet occupation, supported by the Russian secret police of Beria's time, meant for the peoples who were subjected to it."<sup>[5]</sup>

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The use to which new materials can be put to deepen our understanding of a particular moment in cold war history is nicely illustrated by the recent co-publication, under the auspices of the Fondazione Giangiacomo Feltrinelli and the Russian Center for the Conservation of Records, of the complete minutes of the three conferences of the Cominform, 1947-1949, together with a full scholarly apparatus of introductions and annotations. The Cominform was established by the Soviet Union in 1947 ostensibly to serve as a clearinghouse for the exchange of information (and instructions) between

Moscow and the Communist parties of Eastern and Central Europe as well as those of Italy and France.

At its first, September 1947, meeting at Sklarska Poreba, in Poland, Andrei Zhdanov laid out the line that the West and the Soviet Union were to be seen as two irreconcilable "camps," the view that was to serve as the doctrinal basis for Soviet foreign policy until Stalin's death. At the Cominform's second meeting, in Bucharest in June 1948, the Soviet-Yugoslav conflict was brought into the open and the "Titoist" heresy was defined and condemned; the "struggle against Titoism" would then be used to shape and justify the persecutions and show trials of the following years. Its last meeting, in Hungary in November 1949, served only to confirm the now rigid domestic and internal lines of Communist policy. Thereafter the activities of the Cominform were confined to the publication of a newsletter and it was finally abandoned in 1956, overtaken by the changes of the Khrushchev era.

The Cominform is important because its founding and the proceedings of its conferences, especially the first, are a vital clue to the motives and timing of the apparent Communist shift during 1947 to confrontation with the Western powers. We have always been quite well informed about it. Both of the Yugoslav delegates to the first conference, Milovan Djilas and Edvard Kardelj, have published their memoirs. One of the two Italian delegates, Eugenio Reale, later left the Italian Communist Party and wrote a book describing his experiences at the founding Cominform meeting. The Yugoslav government published selections of its own correspondence with Stalin and other documents dating from the preparation of the second conference in order to defend itself against Stalin's charges. The Cominform published its own bowdlerized account of its proceedings. What more can we hope to learn from the complete minutes?<sup>[6]</sup>

The records of the Cominform, together with the preparatory materials discovered in Russian archives, permit us to see things somewhat differently in three respects, and they are not insignificant. In the first place, and this confirms something that emerges from Norman Naimark's recent study of the Soviet occupation of eastern Germany, Stalin was by no means clear in his own mind over how to proceed in his zone of European influence.<sup>[7]</sup> His underlying strategy was never in question—to gain full and permanent Communist control of every state in the region. But the tactical options remained open. As late as June 1946, in a conversation with Tito, Stalin said he was firmly opposed to a resurrection in any form of the old, centralized Comintern which had exercised rigid control and issued detailed instructions to all Communist parties from Moscow and had been shut down in 1943. But the proposal of the Marshall Plan in 1947, and the unresolved division of Germany, led Stalin, in any case chronically predisposed to perceive a Western threat even when none existed, to seek tighter doctrinal and administrative control over all the Communist parties of Central Europe, especially those like the Czechs who were still under the illusion that they might pursue a distinctive "road" to Socialism. The various drafts of Zhdanov's Cominform speech, as they were prepared during the summer of 1947, reveal a progressive clarification, a hardening of the line.

Secondly, the relative disarray of international Communism in the immediate postwar years is now clearer than it once was. The tactics of the Italian and French Communists, seeking to capitalize on their Resistance aura and obtain power through parliamentary means, had failed by May 1947, when they, like the Belgian Communists, left their coalition governments. At the Cominform meeting in Poland they were duly attacked by the Russians and the Yugoslavs for their lack of revolutionary fervor, for their erstwhile commitment to a non-revolutionary path to power, and for their failure to anticipate the "changed circumstances" that led Stalin, via Zhdanov, to denounce the path of "peaceful coexistence." It was long supposed, and Eugenio Reale in particular insisted on this point, that criticism of the French and Italians for their "right-wing deviationism" was a Soviet ploy to shift onto the hapless Western Communist parties the blame for the failure of Moscow's own previous tactic of "cooperation" with the former allies in Western Europe.

But it now seems possible, from a letter by Zhdanov to the French Communist leader Maurice Thorez, dated June 2, 1947, a copy of which was sent to other Communist chiefs (one was recently discovered in the Party archives in Prague), that Moscow was at times as much in the dark about the tactics of the French CP as anyone else: "Many think that the French Communists coordinated their activities [with Moscow]. You know this is not true. Your steps were a total surprise to us." The Cominform, then, really was established to put an end to the comparative tactical anarchy that had seeped into the Communist camp during and after the war. In this it was a complete success. Suitably chagrined, even the Italians cleaved assiduously to the Moscow line thenceforth, at some cost to their own domestic political credibility. As late as April 1963, long after the dismantling of the Cominform and shortly before his death, Palmiro Togliatti, the historic leader of the Partito Comunista Italiano (PCI), wrote to Antonin Novotny, Dubcek's predecessor as general secretary of the Czech Communist Party, begging him to postpone the forthcoming public "rehabilitation" of Rudolf Slánsky and the other victims of the December 1952 Prague trial. Such an announcement, he wrote (implicitly acknowledging the PCI's complicity in defending the show trials of the early Fifties), "would unleash a furious campaign against us, bringing to the fore all the most idiotic and provocative anti-Communist themes [*i temi più stupidi e provocatori dell'anticomunismo*] and hurting us in the forthcoming elections."<sup>181</sup>

Thirdly, and in contrast with interpretations based on the memory of participants who had no first-hand knowledge of Soviet intentions, we now know that the Cominform was not brought into being for the purpose of trying to pull the Yugoslavs into line, even though it acquired that function in due course. To be sure, Tito was a nagging problem for Stalin and had been since 1945. The Yugoslav efforts to acquire parts of Austrian Carinthia and the Istrian city of Trieste were an embarrassment to Stalin in his dealings with the Western allies, and an impediment to the domestic progress of the Italian Communists especially. Tito's initial support for the Greek Communists was similarly embarrassing, since Greece fell unambiguously into the Western "sphere." Yugoslav ambitions to create and lead a Balkan Federation incorporating Albania and Bulgaria ran afoul of Stalin's preference for maintaining his own direct control over each country in his sphere of influence. And the unabashedly revolutionary domestic policies of the Yugoslav Party—which held power without the constraint of alliances with "friendly" parties and was thus

far more radical and ruthless than other East European Communists—risked putting in the shade the Soviet model. In matters of revolution Tito was becoming more Catholic than the Soviet pope.

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In spite of this, the Cominform was not set in place as a device to bring the Yugoslavs to order. The attack on the French and Italians at the Sklarska Poreba meeting in 1947 was led by the Yugoslav delegates with self-righteous fervor and not a little arrogance—which helps account for the enthusiasm with which those same French and Italian Communists welcomed the Yugoslavs' later fall from favor, and for the stridently anti-Titoist ardor of the French and Italian Communist leadership in years to come.<sup>[9]</sup> But the Yugoslavs were not just following Soviet orders in a devious, Machiavellian scheme, as later commentators supposed. Zhdanov's own drafts for his critique of the Western Communists were no less hostile than those of his Balkan comrades, and the Yugoslavs, for their part, clearly believed everything they said. Certainly it was part of Stalin's technique to mobilize one set of deviants against another, only to deal with the first group later on, a method he had perfected in the intra-party struggles of the 1920s. But although the "leftist" heresy of Titoism was duly condemned the following year, there appears to be no evidence that this was planned in 1947.

The newly exploited sources for the history of the Cominform, then, will not change the broad picture dramatically. But they allow us to amend our understanding in small matters, and the accumulation of such amendments enables us to construct a more accurate and finely meshed picture. How does the overall story now look? To begin with, the cold war always existed in Stalin's head and in one version of the Soviet world-picture. Nothing Western statesmen did or didn't do would have altered that. But beyond his determination to control a significant zone of Europe, Stalin had no ambitious master plan—indeed, he was markedly averse to taking risks. In Molotov's words, "our ideology stands for offensive operations when possible, and if not, we wait."<sup>[10]</sup> It probably follows from this that the policy of "containment" adopted in 1947 might well have worked earlier than it did, had it been attempted. But whenever it was applied, it did not "begin" the cold war.

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One reason for this is that the "Sovietization" of Eastern Europe and the eastern zone of Germany, while it was not part of a fully worked-out scheme, was probably inevitable under the circumstances. As Norman Naimark wisely remarks, "Soviet officers bolshevized the zone not because there was a plan to do so, but because that was the only way they knew to organize society."<sup>[11]</sup> Much the same applies to the treatment meted out to other countries of Eastern Europe. Nothing short of the expulsion of the Red Army troops could have prevented this outcome, and no Western leader seriously considered an attempt to expel them. And once tight Soviet control had been established, Western policymakers had little choice but to suppose that it would be applied further west, if opportunity permitted, and to plan accordingly. It now seems unlikely that Stalin would

have seriously contemplated moving further west. But in Gaddis's words, "It would be the height of arrogance for historians to condemn those who made history for not having availed themselves of histories yet to be written. Nightmares always seem real at the time—even if, in the clear light of dawn, a little ridiculous."

Once the battlelines were clearly drawn, in Europe at least, there seem to have been very few "missed opportunities" for erasing them. The most famous of these, Stalin's suggestion of March 1952 for an agreement to disengage in Germany, can now be seen for what its critics at the time took it to be: a readiness to sacrifice East Germany, certainly, but only in exchange for a united but "neutral" Germany under effective Soviet domination. The centrality of the future of a divided Germany, and more generally of Europe, in the shaping of the cold war is also very clear. Conflicts in Korea, Malaya, Cuba, Vietnam, or Angola, bloody as they were, remained peripheral to the main contest in Europe, at least until the series of crises and confrontations over Berlin (1948-1949, 1953, 1958-1961) was brought to an end with the building in August 1961 of the Berlin Wall—when both Great Powers, whatever they said in public, heaved a private sigh of relief.

It is perhaps odd, in retrospect, that the wartime Allies should have gone to such enormous trouble and nearly come to blows in order to protect the interests of client states in the land of their former enemy. But it is a characteristic of cold wars (ours was not the first) that they concentrate contention on symbols—and the unresolved status of Germany was the symbol of the unfinished postwar settlement. For this reason the rulers of West and East Germany alike were able for many years to exercise a leverage over Great Power politics utterly disproportionate to their own strength or importance.

## 2.

There was no room for maneuver in Europe; each side depended on an arsenal (the Soviets on conventional ground forces, NATO on airborne atomic weapons) in which it was vastly superior to its foe. In view of this stalemate, movement and misunderstanding were likely to take place elsewhere. The recent evidence available shows that Harry Truman and other Western leaders were wrong to suppose that the North Korean attack on the South was intended by Stalin either to divert both the attention and the military forces of the Western powers or as a prelude to an attack in Europe—but they did believe this, and their reaction, to strengthen NATO and propose the rearmament of West Germany, was rational and prudent in the circumstances.

Unfortunately, the propensity to treat events elsewhere as indicators or replicas of the situation in Europe, rather than as processes at work in the non-European world, characterized much US policy in the coming decades, from John Foster Dulles's "bungling" in the Middle East, as Gaddis puts it, to the disaster of Vietnam. But this tendency derived from the understanding that whatever happened elsewhere in the world, the cold war was about Europe; it was in Europe that it must be prevented from heating up, and only in Europe could it be ended. As we now know, this was very much the way things looked from the Kremlin, too. Stalin supported Kim Il Sung's aggression with

reluctance, and he and his successors expressed grave reservations about the impetuosity of Mao Tse-tung. But in the end they condoned risks in Korea, Vietnam, and elsewhere that they would never have approved in Germany or the Balkans.

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Access to the archives closes off a number of avenues of interpretation that remained stubbornly open until after the fall of the Soviet Union. "Revisionism," the wishful search for evidence that the US bore primary responsibility for the origin and pursuit of the Cold War, is now a dead duck. Certainly the West, especially Western Europe, gained much from the division of Europe and the world into spheres of influence, but this was far from clear in 1947. In any case it was not the Americans but the British, Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin in particular, who first came to the conclusion that it might be just as well if postwar efforts to resolve the German question were put on ice. American negotiators, in the Rooseveltian tradition, took rather longer to disengage from the search for agreement with the Russians. An alternative revisionist strategy was to suggest that the cold war, and its related hot conflicts, were the outcome of social and political processes set in motion long before. It might seem as though someone was responsible for starting something, but in practice blame could not be assigned to one side or the other. In Bruce Cumings's words, "Who started the Korean War? This question should not be asked."<sup>[12]</sup> But except in the trivial sense that all immediate causes have long-term determinants, this position is no longer tenable. With the benefit of somewhat better information we can, now, assign responsibility mostly to the USSR for, among other events, the breakdown of German negotiations in 1947, the outbreak of the Korean War, various confrontations over Berlin.

The revisionist search for evidence of Western guilt was sometimes associated with a cultivated distaste in scholarly circles for the notion that "intelligence" mattered in the making of history, that spies seriously affected the course of events. In view of the intelligence community's miserable record (on both sides) when it came to predicting outcomes, this is an understandable prejudice, but it turns out to be mistaken. Spies were quite important in the cold war, the early years especially, and not only in the famous theft of atomic secrets. The French foreign ministry, like the British ruling class, leaked exuberantly for many years and provided Moscow's Paris embassy, as well as the Soviet agents in Berlin, with a steady stream of inside information. The Soviet intelligence network was distinctly superior to that of the West—as well it might be, since it had been in place in some countries since the late Twenties. Its weakness lay in the inability of the Moscow leadership to hear, or understand, what its agents were trying to tell it—a longstanding problem in the USSR, which in its most egregious instance led Stalin in the spring of 1941 to reject all warnings that Hitler was about to attack. As Dean Acheson once noted in another context, "We were fortunate in our opponent."<sup>[13]</sup>

Conversely, many of those Western analysts of the cold war who did understand the role of intelligence, and more generally of *Realpolitik*, in the international affairs of the age did not always grasp that if the Soviet Union behaved like a great power in its pursuit of its interests, it was nonetheless not just another empire; it was a Communist empire. One



of the most interesting revelations of the new source material, and Gaddis pays it due attention, is the place of ideology in the thinking of Soviet leaders. On this there were for a long time three competing schools of thought. The first held that Soviet policymakers should be regarded as behaving and thinking roughly like Americans: playing off domestic interest groups, calculating economic or military advantage, and pursuing goals convergent, albeit competitive, with those of their Western opponents. The public language they used when pursuing these goals was neither here nor there.

The second school insisted that Soviet policymakers were the heirs of the Tsars: their first concern was the geopolitical interests of Russia. Their ideological language should be treated as a contingent and secondary feature and need not be taken too much into account when dealing with them. A third group argued that the Soviet Union was a Communist state, and that the terms in which its leaders described the world were also the terms in which they understood it: therefore their ideological presuppositions were the most important thing to know about them.

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The first school dominated US "Sovietology" for many years but is now defunct, along with the political system it so miserably failed to understand. The second school, whose most sophisticated spokesman was George Kennan, clearly had a case. Even if we knew little of communism we could still make reasonably good sense of Soviet foreign policy in the years between 1939 and 1990 by reference to "conventional" diplomatic criteria alone, given an informed appreciation of Russian history. Moreover, no one who ever had any dealings with the last generation of Communist "apparatchiks" in Eastern Europe would ever suppose that these were men driven by higher ideals or the search for doctrinal consistency for its own sake. Nonetheless, it now seems clear that ideology did play a role in the thinking of Soviet leaders in the cold war era, from Stalin to Gorbachev. Like Truman, Eisenhower, or Kennedy, their understanding of the world was shaped by their presuppositions about it. In the Soviet case those presuppositions were basically Marxist, which by the time of Stalin's death denoted little more than crude economic determinism spiced with the expectation of ultimate victory on the international battleground of class.

What that meant in practice, for example, was that when Andrei Zhdanov learned of the Truman Doctrine he referred to it in his report for the first Cominform meeting as growing evidence of an Anglo-American rift, because of the US "expulsion of Britain from its sphere of influence in the Mediterranean and the Near East." Truman himself was described in an internal 1946 Kremlin memo exclusively in terms of the economic interests ("circles of American monopoly capital") he purportedly represented. Berlin-based intelligence officials consistently analyzed the behavior and discussions of Western leaders (about which they were otherwise well-informed) as deriving from the "economic tensions" among them, and so on.

Again and again the behavior of the West was thus reduced to hypothetical motives and interests that were exclusively economic. It doesn't ultimately matter whether everyone,

from Molotov to the lowliest intelligence operative or party functionary, "really" believed what they said; the point is that everything they said, to one another as well as to the outside world, was couched in this wooden, twilight language. Even Gorbachev—or perhaps above all Gorbachev, who was a product of three generations of "Marxist" political pedagogy—thought and often spoke thus, which is why he was genuinely taken aback at the outcome of his own actions.

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John Gaddis rightly criticizes Western "realists" for failing to understand that men are motivated by what they think and believe and not just by objective or measurable interests. But he goes a little further. The cold war's move out of its European birthplace, through Asia and on into the most unlikely places—Mozambique, Ethiopia, Somalia, Angola, and especially Cuba—was what he calls, referring to Khrushchev and Brezhnev, "a pattern of geriatric over-exertion." In their old age, he thinks, these men were rediscovering in exotic locales the revolutionary romance of their Russian youth—no longer aging Communist apparatchiks, they were once again revolutionary Bolsheviks—albeit working through intermediaries. This seems perhaps overimaginative, and anyway redundant. Why can we not agree that the history of the Soviet Union (and thus of the cold war) makes no sense unless we take seriously the ideological outlook of its leaders, while at the same time conceding with Molotov that they were in the business of advancing their political interests whenever and wherever the chance arose? Of course they invoked the case for revolution when justifying interventions abroad—and in Khrushchev's case he was truly moved to enthusiasm by the Cubans, as we know from his memoirs. But interest, belief, and emotion are not inherently incompatible sources of human behavior.

The emphasis upon the "geriatric" delusions of the Soviet leadership brings us back to my starting point. From the perspective of the US—and until recently most writings on the history of the cold war have perforce been written from the point of view of the US in particular—the cold war began in 1947 with the collapse of the wartime Allied coalition. As John Lukacs has noted, there was a dramatic and unprecedented policy shift in Washington over a period of about eighteen months in the years 1946- 1947, and American state policy and public opinion have not been the same since.<sup>[14]</sup> Gaddis, however, wants us to understand the cold war from a different perspective, as an organic outgrowth of the Second World War itself—and particularly of Stalin's desire to absorb the new territory occupied by his armies—rather than a sort of unfortunate international traffic accident that befell the world in that war's aftermath. But why not go a little further? From the point of view of contemporaries, after all, Europe in 1945 was not just a prelude to some unknown future; it was also the heir to a real and well-remembered past.

From the perspective of a European statesman looking at the years 1900-1945—and most senior leaders were in a position to do so from personal recollection and involvement—Europe (and therefore the world) faced four related dilemmas: how to restore the international balance upset by the rise of Prussian-dominated Germany after 1871; how

to bring Russia back into the concert of nations in some stable way, following the distortions produced by the Russian Revolution and its international aftermath; how to rescue the international economy from the disastrous collapse of the interwar years and somehow recapture the growth and stability of the pre-1914 era; and how to compensate for the anticipated decline of Great Britain as an economic and political factor in international affairs.

Between 1944 and 1947 a variety of possible solutions to these problems was debated, and all of them presumed a degree of continuity with the past. The French would have gone a long way to get a Russian alliance, on the model of that of 1894, but France no longer had anything to offer the Russians in return.<sup>[15]</sup> Many West Germans, Adenauer in particular, were not at all averse to abandoning the Prussian east—which as Catholic Rhinelanders they in any case cordially disliked and feared—in exchange for closer ties to the historically familiar lands to their west. The French Socialist leader Léon Blum (born in 1872) shared Winston Churchill's forward-looking enthusiasm for a Western European community to compensate for the drastically weakened condition of the region's separate nation-states. And Stalin, echoing the imperatives of a long Great Russian history as well as the lessons of the recent past, saw a chance to take advantage of German weakness (much as his predecessors had exploited that of eighteenth-century Poland) in order to secure the USSR's imperial hinterland in the west.

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What made these familiar strategies difficult to pursue in the circumstances of 1945 was, first, the existence of independent states in the space separating Russia from Germany; secondly the distinctive character of the Russo-Soviet regime itself; and thirdly the absence of sufficient countervailing power to Germany's west. Before World War One none of these impediments had existed. In 1914 the Baltic states, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Yugoslavia, and much of Romania lay within the borders of German, Austrian, Turkish, or Russian empires. The independence of these countries established at Versailles in 1919 could not be sustained—as Hitler had demonstrated and Stalin was now confirming—without the very sort of will and power that the Western Europeans failed to exercise in 1938 and did not have in 1945. But the fact that they had now known independence made Russian occupation particularly repugnant. Meanwhile, the nature of the Communist regime made its imperial ambition much more threatening to a war-weakened Western Europe than the Tsarist designs on Central or Southeastern Europe in days past. And Britain's economic exhaustion, combined with the disappearance of France as a factor in international politics, gave the leaders of these countries no option but to persuade the United States to take their place.

In these circumstances the cold war represented not a problem but a solution, which is one reason why it lasted so long. By bringing America into Europe to provide security against further change, the West Europeans assured themselves of the stability and protection required for the reconstruction of their half of the continent. Ironically, the US thus behaved much as Tsarist Russia had for two decades following Napoleon's defeat in 1815; i.e., as a sort of continental policeman whose presence guaranteed that there would

be no further disruption of the status quo by an unruly revolutionary power. The Soviet Union meanwhile was left to get on with the dictatorial governance of its half of the continent, with a promise of noninterference in return for its abstention from further adventures—an arrangement that was actually quite satisfactory to Stalin and his heirs.<sup>[16]</sup> This was hardly an outcome calculated to please the millions of Poles and others thereby incarcerated under "socialist" rule; but since they had not been regarded by most Allied policymakers as part of the problem, it is hardly surprising that they did not figure prominently in the solution, either.

Seen thus, the cold war can take its place in the *longue durée* of European and international history. Complications arose for two reasons. First, alignments and divisions in Europe became intertwined with the politics of national independence movements and of decolonization in Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East, with seriously misleading consequences for all parties involved. From 1956 to 1974 there grew up a curious commerce: Western Europe and the US exported nineteenth-century liberal ideas and institutions to the developing world, holding the capitalist West up as a model for emulation and urging the adoption of its customs and practices; they received in exchange revolutionary myths and prototypes calculated to challenge their own bland (and relative) prosperity. The Soviet Union engaged in a similar trade. It, too, exported a nineteenth-century ideology—Marxist socialism—and received in return the rather spurious fealty of fresh would-be revolutionaries, whose activities cast a brief, retroactive glow of credibility upon the faded Bolshevik heritage.

The second complication was the presence of nuclear weapons. For a long time these added confusion, and thus risk, to the making of policy. The Soviet Union was nearly always far behind in the arms race (though the well-oiled techniques of Prince Potemkin's heirs kept this fact hidden from the US for many years); but this inferiority only inclined its leaders to strike compensatory aggressive poses. US policy-makers, meanwhile, took many years (and spent inordinate sums of money) to learn what Truman appears to have grasped instinctively from the start—that nuclear weapons were strikingly unhelpful as instruments of statecraft. In contrast to spears, they really were only good for sitting on. Nonetheless, as a deterrent device a nuclear arsenal had its uses—but only if both you and your opponent could be convinced that it might, ultimately, be deployed. For this reason the cold war for many years sustained a prospect of terror out of all proportion to the issues at stake—or the intentions of almost of the participants.

Because of these two new elements, the cold war seemed to change its nature and become something radically different from anything that had gone before. And when it ended, with the collapse of one adversary, there were therefore some who supposed that we had entered a new era in human history. Since 1990 we can see that this was not altogether the case. The world has certainly changed utterly since 1950: the horses are gone and so has the coal, together with the social dispositions and forms of work that they symbolized. The great reforming projects are gone too, at least for the time being. But now that we won the cold war we can see better than we could before that some of the dilemmas it addressed (or screened from view) are still with us. Recent history suggests that the solution will be as elusive as ever.

## Notes

<sup>[1]</sup> *The United States and the Origins of the Cold War, 1941-1947* (Columbia University Press, 1972); *The Long Peace: Inquiries into the History of the Cold War* (Oxford University Press, 1987); *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of Postwar American National Security Policy* (Oxford University Press, 1982); *The United States and the End of the Cold War: Implications, Reconsiderations, Provocations* (Oxford University Press, 1992).

<sup>[2]</sup> See the discussion in Norman Naimark and Leonid Gibianskii, editors, *The Establishment of Communist Regimes in Eastern Europe, 1944-1949* (Westview, 1997), Introduction, pp. 1-17.

<sup>[3]</sup> See, e.g., the publications of Thierry Wintton: *Le Grand Recrutement* (Paris: Grasset, 1993) and *La France sous influence allemande* (Grasset, 1997). A recent book by Karel Bartosek, *Les Aveux des Archives: Prague-Paris-Prague 1948-1968* (Paris: Seuil, 1996), created a stir by claiming that Czech archives reveal Artur London to have remained in the service of the Czech authorities long after his release from prison and the publication of his acclaimed autobiographical account of the show trials, *L'Aveu* (The Confession). Bartosek made copious use of hitherto secret archives, but the evidence he accumulated is suggestive and circumstantial rather than conclusive.

<sup>[4]</sup> Norman Naimark and Leonid Gibianskii, editors, *The Establishment of Communist Regimes in Eastern Europe, 1944-1949* (Westview, 1997), Introduction, pp. 9-10. See, e.g., Hugh Seton-Watson, *The East European Revolution* (London: Methuen, 1950), Adam B. Ulam, *Titoism and the Cominform* (Harvard University Press, 1952), and Vojtech Mastny, *Russia's Road to Cold War* (Columbia University Press, 1979).

<sup>[5]</sup> George Kennan, "The View from Moscow," in Thomas T. Hammond, editor, *Witnesses to the Origins of the Cold War* (University of Washington Press, 1982), p. 29.

<sup>[6]</sup> Milovan Djilas, *Rise and Fall* (Harvard, Brace, Jovanovich, 1985); Edvard Kardelj, *Reminiscences: The Struggle for Recognition and Independence: The New Yugoslavia, 1944-1957* (London: Blond and Briggs, 1962); Euge-nio Reale, *Nascita del Cominform* (Milan: Mondadori, 1958), translated from French as *Avec Jacques Duclos au banc des accusés à la Réunion Constitutive du Kominform à Sklarska Poreba (22-27 septembre 1947)* (Paris: Plon, 1958).

<sup>[7]</sup> Norman Naimark, *The Russians in Germany: A History of the Soviet Zone of Occupation, 1945-1949* (Harvard University Press, 1995).

<sup>[8]</sup> See Bartosek, *Les Aveux des Archives*, p. 372, Appendix 28. For Zhdanov's letter to Thorez, see Vladislav Zubok and Constantine Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War* (Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 129.

[9] Having been forced to grovel at Sklarsh, Poreba and apologize for the French Communists' failure to learn from the heretic Yugoslav example, Jacques Duclos (who led the French delegation on both occasions) took his revenge at Bucharest the following year. "It is evident," he remarked, "that the leaders of the Yugoslav Communist Party deny the Leninist principle of the need for criticism and self-criticism." It was perfectly normal, he insisted, that the Information Bureau should examine the situation in the Yugoslav Party: "The leaders of that Party ought to have been the first to agree to this, especially since, at the previous conference of the Information Bureau, they did not fail to make use of their right to criticise other Parties." To which, according to the minutes, Andrei Zhdanov interjected "Even to grovels"—a delicious dash of Stalinist humbug (see *The Comintern: Minutes of the Three Conferences*, p. 557).

[10] Vyacheslav Molotov, *Molotov Remembers: Inside Kremlin Politics; Conversations with Felix Chuev*, Albert Resis, editor (Oxford: R. Dee, 1993), p. 29, quoted by Gaddis, *We Now Know*, p. 31.

[11] Naimark, *The Russians in Germany*, p. 467. For the same general point in a different context see Jan T. Gross, *Revolution from Abroad: The Soviet Conquest of Poland's Western Ukraine and Western Belorussia* (Princeton University Press, 1988).

[12] Bruce Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War: The Roaring of the Cataract, 1947-1950* (Princeton University Press, 1990), p. 621, quoted in Gaddis, *We Now Know*, p. 71. Cumings is unusual in drawing heavily on foreign-language primary sources. Most revisionist scholars were experts in US foreign policy, used few if any non-US sources, and tended to project on to the rest of the world the prejudices of US domestic politics (real and academic).

[13] Dean Acheson, *Present at the Creation: My Years in the State Department* (Norton, 1969), p. 646. Acheson was discussing the way in which Soviet bullying of Adenauer in 1952 helped secure West German support for American goals.

[14] *George F. Kennan and the Origins of Containment, 1944-1946* (University of Missouri Press, 1997), Introduction by John Lukacs, p. 7.

[15] On the occasion of his visit to Moscow in December 1944, seeking a Russian alliance as security against the revival of Germany, Charles de Gaulle is reported to have explained to his entourage that ideology need be no impediment to the pursuit of timeless French interests: "I deal with Stalin as I once dealt with Suleiman—with this difference, that in sixteenth-century Istanbul there was no Muslim party." See Wolton, *La France sous influence*, p. 57.

[16] Stalin's post-1947 rejection of "peaceful coexistence"—echoing to the phrase an identical policy switch in 1927—can better be understood as not so much a prelude to foreign adventure as a signal of coming domestic repression. And so it proved.