Rethinking the Cold War and the American empire

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Abstract

The end of the Cold War has renewed interest in Cold War historiography, leading to an explosion of academic literature in this field. A "new Cold War history" seems to be emerging, promising to offer a more international and less "orthodox" perspective, tapping on multi-archival sources. A spate of new works on the crucial and formative period of the Cold War (1945–52) has appeared, on the one hand, shedding a new light on the emergence of the postwar American empire and its foreign relations, and on the other hand, re-examining the role of the Soviet Union and its allies in the origins of the Cold War. This paper provides a general overview of this new trend in Cold War historiography, arguing that several dimensions of the Cold War are still present in the post-Cold War world, and that they could be understood by rethinking the Cold War and the American empire.

Introduction

This article examines some of the dominant trends and contentious issues in Cold War historiography; that is, the different ways of narrating the Cold War, which contribute to divergent ways of understanding the past and present and of envisioning the future. It focuses on some positivistic debates between traditionalist and revisionist historians on the origins of the Cold War and on the emergence of the American empire (euphemistically called American "internationalism") in the post Second World War world; positivistic, that is, because both schools of thought insist that their respective picture of the past is closer to the truth, to the big picture. Where applicable, it also points to the "consensus" historians have inter-subjectively reached on various issues. The discussion is limited to the period 1945–52, when most of the fundamental structures and institutions of the Cold War were conceived.

The approach is thematic as opposed to chronological. Also, the approach is to challenge the hegemonic discursive economy of Cold War
historiography and adopt a peripheral view, which seeks to “challenge the abstract assumptions, such as progress, modernization, destiny, and internationalism, upon which dominant systems of power have rested.” In other words, it challenges the American triumphalism or smugness radiating since the end of the Cold War. Here is a typical example: “The world today would not be a better place if, after 1945, the United States had been unwilling to maintain its military might and global presence or to help its allies and former enemies rally and rebuild.” The author not only “rejoices in America’s Cold War success, but sees in it proof of the practical strengths as well as the moral virtues of the American regime.” This triumphalism is in part related to the answer to the question: Was the Cold War really “the long peace” or was it really “nasty, brutish, and long”? And the answer to this question requires a close and critical examination of the postwar American empire: its role in the peace and violence of the Cold War. Suffice it to say here that the Cold War was not peaceful: there were 149 wars and 23.1 million related deaths. The Cold War was also fraught with tension and crises and its peace was not permanent.

Traditionalist and revisionist debates on the Cold War

American historians of the so-called “orthodox school” (such as Samuel Flagg Bemis, Herbert Feis, and Thomas Bailey) dominated the early Cold War historiography. They wrote diplomatic histories based on researches in (largely American) archives, focused on the state as the primary actor, and assigned the blame on the Soviet Union for initiating the Cold War. In other words, they reflected and co-constructed the American official line. The US was merely reacting to real (as opposed to perceived, exaggerated, or constructed) Soviet aggression: external factors drove US Cold War policy. The Cold War marked a drastic shift in US foreign policy; the Soviet threat forced the US to abandon isolationism and reluctantly embrace internationalism. At the same time they emphasize the benevolent nature of the US, which sought to protect democracy, freedom, prosperity, openness, geopolitical balance, and universal justice. They tended to draw the connection between the domestic political system and foreign policy: democracy at home led to a peaceful and democratic foreign policy. The totalitarian Soviet Union in contrast was expansionistic and thought in terms of spheres of influence. Thus the USSR was an affront to American ideology and interest. Moreover, Stalin suffered from paranoia: he could never be appeased in
any way. Nothing the US did could have accommodated Stalin. Stalin was in a better position to accommodate the US than the other way around because of the totalitarian nature of the Soviet political system. Postwar American leaders were acting responsibly, wisely, prudently, and even heroically by containing the USSR.\textsuperscript{6} Containment was right.

This consensus began to break in the 1960s, in part because of the Vietnam War, a situation wherein the US was not only not winning but its soldiers were revealed to be committing massive atrocities and its politicians were caught chronically lying. Revisionism questioned the assumptions of the traditional school. Instead of seeing the Cold War as a sharp break in US foreign relations, revisionist historians began to search for continuities. And they also turned inward, looking for internal or domestic factors or forces that helped determine American expansion and foreign policy. Walter LaFeber is representative of this view:

> The most durable and productive key for unlocking the motivations of US foreign policy since the 1890s has been Washington officials' belief that a global system based on the needs of private capital, including the protection of private property and access to markets, could best protect the burgeoning American system and its values, including its own version of democracy at home.\textsuperscript{7}

The revisionist school spearheaded by William Appleman Williams argued that the American quest for foreign markets and Open Door Policy at the end of the Second World War "committed [the US] to policies which hardened the natural and inherent tensions and propensities into bitter antagonisms and inflexible positions."\textsuperscript{8} At the very least the Open Door Policy and foreign markets were deemed necessary for the US to avert an economic depression: the US had to constantly expand its market to survive and prosper. More important, capitalism was an international system.

Being the stronger party, the US was in a more favorable position to explore various alternatives to accommodate the USSR; unlike traditionalists, revisionists argued that the US had a preponderance of power at the end of the Second World War. That it did not do so was largely because of its economic and imperial interests. In other words, the US would still have been expansionistic even without the Soviet threat. The reasons include the desire to restructure the postwar political economy of the world (to restructure international capitalism), to secure strategic resources (most notably oil), to expand military bases and a "defense" perimeter based on a new conception of "security," to achieve a
preponderance of power, and to counter Third World nationalism and movements that threatened the American design of the world. In this light, postwar American leaders were not wise and prudent. Rather they exaggerated the Soviet power in order to legitimize America's aggressive expansion, to rally the world's peoples around the American empire. Instead of heroism the revisionists saw tragedy.

John Lewis Gaddis has shown how each postwar US administration interpreted containment differently, therefore coming up with different strategies of containment. Gaddis is right to show that containment was not unchanging and over-determined. However, containment was rooted in false and problematic assumptions which "contained" knowledge about the USSR. Many revisionist historians have pointed to the flaws in George Kennan's reasoning. First, Kennan depicted the USSR as both weak and expansionistic. Kennan knew that the USSR was weak but still exaggerated its power. Containment was a policy reflecting the weakness of the USSR. Because the USSR was weak, the logic went, it would suffer from an implosion or undergo a mellowing of the system when contained. Second, Kennan failed to logically explain why the USSR was compelled to expand. Third, Kennan saw Soviet foreign policy as deriving solely from internal factors (history, Marxist-Leninism, Stalin's paranoia, etc.) He made no effort to evaluate how US goals and policies might have impacted on the USSR as if to say that Soviet leaders were autistic. If the USSR was weaker than the US, might not American foreign policy objectives shape the conditions of Soviet foreign policy making? A resounding "no" was Kennan's answer. Based on Kennan's reasoning the US could do whatever it wanted, and its action would always be interpreted as defensive.

The exaggeration of Soviet power and threat during the Cold War became increasingly irrefutable as the USSR retrenched in the 1980s and eventually imploded in 1991. Michael Cox sums up well:

The problem was that those who stressed Soviet expansionism appeared oblivious to other facts: that the Soviet reach was never great; that Moscow frequently exercised great caution; that it sometimes retreated voluntarily; and perhaps, most important, that for an inefficient and uncompetitive system like the Soviet Union, expansion was an extraordinary burden and one likely to grow as the economy began to slow down. The tension between traditionalism and revisionism eventually contributed to a new synthesis known as post-revisionism, which has
benefited from the use of new archival materials. The most renowned representative of this school is probably John Lewis Gaddis. Post-revisionism is closer to the orthodox school than revisionism however. For instance, it focuses on the elite policy-making process, on the state as the principal actor, and on strategic and geopolitical determinants of foreign policy—e.g., the “national interest,” balance of power, and national security. Economic considerations are relegated to secondary roles. Furthermore, whenever economic interests do matter, they are treated as driven by broader geopolitical concerns rather than domestic pressures. And post-revisionism maintains that the US was by and large reacting to Soviet aggression and foreign policy: the US might have constructed a postwar empire (as the revisionists argued), but it was defensive in character or was “invited” from abroad. Post-revisionism maintains the heroic narrative of American expansion after the Second World War. As such, some have called post-revisionism “traditionalism with archives.”

Revisionism and post-revisionism are still the dominant trends in Cold War historiography, and the tensions between these two broad schools of thought have not been or could not be easily resolved despite the surfacing of new archival materials (especially from the Chinese and Russian archives) as historical debates are often over narrative interpretations as opposed to facts. Nevertheless, it seems that the Cold War is increasingly being studied and interpreted in the form of international history.

**Demise of the Grand Alliance**

When studying the origins of the Cold War, one of the very first issues to explore is the demise of the Grand Alliance. The traditional view argues that the USSR was largely responsible for the breakdown of postwar cooperation between the Big Three, particularly for refusing to uphold the Yalta commitments on holding democratic elections in Poland, and for aggressively carving a sphere of influence in Eastern Europe. In other words, Soviet actions in Poland and Eastern Europe served as the test cases of Soviet postwar ambitions, of the Kremlin’s expansionism. US President Franklin Roosevelt was to blame for refusing to stand up to Stalin at Yalta. Yalta is—and has long been—depicted as a sellout.

New scholarships tends to move away from these simplistic assessments. Although a varied lot, many historians are pointing to the
fact that "spheres of influence" had more or less been formed prior to the outbreak of the Cold War. The Yalta agreements merely reflected or were the culmination of the military situation in Europe and other prior understandings between the great powers—for example, the Italian and Rumanian precedents of 1942 and the secret Tolstoy meeting (percentage deal) between Churchill and Stalin in 1944. Stalin's dictum of whoever militarily controlled an area would determine its politico-economic future was recognized by the Anglo-American side as well. After the Red Army's victory in the battle of Stalingrad in 1943, the Nazis were more or less considered defeated in Europe; the Anglo-American landing in Normandy in 1944 (D-day) was executed in order to gain a foothold in Europe and in order to determine its postwar politico-economic orientations. William Hitchcock suggests,

...[T]he [Yalta] conference revealed the dominating position of the Soviet Union in Eastern Europe, a position won after four years of brutal war; and it revealed the limited ability of the Americans and British to challenge that dominance. Roosevelt sought to make a virtue of necessity: instead of opposing the Russians, he hoped to work with them in bringing peace and stability to a war-torn continent through a great-power compromise. Unfortunately, FDR gave a hostage to fortune by declaring after Yalta that the agreements reached there would "spell the end of the system of unilateral action, the exclusive alliances, the spheres of influence, the balance of power, and all the other expedients that have been tried for centuries and always failed." Yalta had achieved nothing of the sort.

However, as Fraser Harbutt contends, Roosevelt might have hoped to mobilize public opinion in the West to force Stalin to accept the idealistic version of Yalta. Or he may have lied to himself that he had succeeded in working out a diplomacy based on idealism.

Roosevelt's untimely death in April 1945 left matters in the hands of his inexperienced successor Harry Truman. FDR's secretary of state Edward Stettinius writes in his diary that Truman admitted that he was "very hazy about Yalta matters" and "that the agreement on Polish political as well as territorial questions was very hazy and he [Truman] was amazed that it wasn't more clear cut." As fuzzy as he was on the Yalta agreements, Truman felt that the Russians were simply treating the accord in bad faith.

Put differently, the understanding and agreements (however tacit or oblique) reached during the Second World War and the way the war ended were conducive to the advent of the Cold War. This also includes
the general political swing to the left in Europe triggered by wartime devastation and political and social changes—trends which were beyond the control of Stalin. Gabriel Kolko has pointed out, and it is worth quoting at length, that

The decision of much of Europe's middle class and traditional ruling classes to compromise with Nazi Germany, or to actively support it in the case of Italy and France, greatly weakened the major institutional barriers to the triumph of the forces of change and radical renovation that flourished in the wake of Allied military successes. Millions of new converts believed that only the Left, with its identification with patriotism, could pretend to fill the massive moral, political, and organizational vacuum that the elites' collaboration had created, and the Communists were the principal beneficiaries of this mood. In Greece, France, and Italy, this transformation posed a basic question about the political and economic future of these crucial nations—but elsewhere the war's consequences gave the Left both nationalist legitimacy and those appeals essential to making it far stronger than it had ever been.\(^{21}\)

Thus as J. Garry Clifford nicely concludes, "Perhaps if it [the Cold War] had started differently, it might have truly constituted a 'long peace'."\(^{22}\) We can also add that perhaps if the Second World War had ended differently, the nature of the Cold War would also have been different.

Roosevelt did not simply write off Eastern Europe to Stalin as often alleged. Here we need to understand Roosevelt's conception of peace. To Roosevelt, peace was a "process", and not an end in itself. Postwar peace thus depended on the cooperation between the Four Policemen (though actually between the Big Three). Opposing the Soviet "sphere" from the outset would not be conducive to postwar peace. Roosevelt hoped that through personal diplomacy and economic and atomic leverages, he could induce Eastern Europe to be more open; of course, he accepted that in terms of foreign and military relations, Eastern Europe must be subordinated to the Kremlin, but he envisioned Eastern Europeans being granted a longer leash in terms of domestic socioeconomic organizations. Only trust between the great powers would realize this vision, Roosevelt surmised.\(^{23}\)

In fact, Stalin valued postwar cooperation with the United States and Britain. Initially, Stalin perceived Germany and Japan as having the greatest potential for posing as future threats, not the US. It was hoped that the US would help rein in these two former enemies. He wanted
American aid and technical assistance as well as a fairly "long breathing space" for the USSR to recover from wartime devastation. In other words, there were good reasons to maintain postwar cooperation with the US, including credits and time for recuperation. After a loss of 27 million people, at least 20 to 30 years were needed to rehabilitate the USSR as some top-level subordinates suggested to Stalin. Moreover, the USSR had to be strong since it was the base of world revolution according to Leninist ideology. The Yalta and Allied wartime agreements showed Stalin that cooperation might be quite beneficial for the USSR. Stalin might have been paranoid, and a "monster" as Robert Conquest elaborately detailed his crimes. But Stalin recognized the USSR's weaknesses. He was no Hitler. Melvyn Leffler convincingly writes thus:

At the end of World War II Stalin realized that the achievement of his goals—territorial gains, national reconstruction, and control over the revival of German and Japanese power—depended on cooperation with the United States. He was inclined to be agreeable because in the short run he was operating from a position of weakness, and he was altogether aware of it.

Promoting communist revolutions worldwide was not a priority—in fact had not been since the "socialism in one country" policy of the 1920s. Stalin's restraint (containment of communist expansion) in Greece, France, and Italy is particularly noteworthy. As Kolko incisively writes,

In a word, there was ample reason to believe that had the armed left been ready to take power in these three nations it would have succeeded in part, if not in entirety, for at least an indefinite period. Its prospects were at least as good as those of the Bolsheviks in Russia in 1917. If it had failed in France, it would have been due primarily to the continuing viability of French conservatism mobilized around de Gaulle; elsewhere the traditional ruling classes had neither military resources nor political legitimacy—above all in the north of Italy and most of Greece.

Similarly Melvyn Leffler writes, "To the great dismay of the communists in France, Italy, Spain, Greece, Stalin discouraged revolutionary action in 1944 and 1945, just when they felt their prominent role in wartime resistance movements and their people's genuine desire for thoroughgoing reforms afforded them a unique opportunity to gain power."

But as two historians have observed, "However much he hoped to
avoid postwar confrontation with the United States, Stalin...could not make up his mind how to achieve his aim." In other words, Stalin's inept diplomacy might have added to American/Western fear or might have enabled them to exploit or exaggerate the Soviet threat to pursue their interests.

According to a recent study by Marc Trachtenberg, by early 1946 the Truman administration wrote off Eastern Europe (at a time when the situation in the region was still quite fluid). Influenced by the new secretary of state James Brynes, in 1946 (that is, after the failure of atomic diplomacy during the Potsdam Conference in 1945) the new and inexperienced president was willing to settle for the status quo in Eastern Europe, for Soviet domination of the area: Eastern Europe would be your garden, while the world would be mine. There would be two worlds, not one—a departure from Rooseveltian peace. Thus Eastern Europe was not the real issue that caused the end of the Alliance. What the real issue was remains an open debate. However, as one historian observes, "the administration of Harry S. Truman realized that its earlier and largely unfruitful contest with the Soviets over Eastern Europe could be turned to advantage in its quest to win public support for its policy of economic and military aid to Western Europe." Bluntly, "Washington's occasional outbursts over Russian policy were basically a ruse for justifying its own policies of consolidation."

The "writing off" of Eastern Europe, including the Soviet zone in eastern Germany, by the Americans was of course far from a cordial process. In fact, it exacerbated tensions between the US and the USSR. Arnold Offner points out that Trachtenberg's argument ignores critical factors, however, not least the significance of the atomic bomb for American diplomacy. The record is clear that the readiness of the atomic bomb inspired Brynes and Truman to take an aggressive negotiating stance with the Russians and to believe that they could impose their will.... Moreover, Trachtenberg misleadingly implies that negotiation over German reparations was amicable.

US visions of the postwar world

Though the Big Three apparently valued postwar cooperation, they also had postwar aims that seemed quite incompatible. As such, they were quite unwilling to compromise for the sake of cooperation. They tended to value unilateral concessions above compromise. The argument
that the Cold War emerged because of the misunderstanding between the great powers thus overlooks this point.

The more nuanced or complex advocates of mainstream scholarship argue that the Cold War spiraled out of the security dilemma: both the US and USSR were acting out of fear and reacting to perceived threats. Though useful, the security dilemma obscures more than explains the dynamics of the origins of the Cold War. For instance, would not American action or reaction have a greater impact on Soviet foreign policy, as Washington was by far the more powerful party? On this view, during the Cold War, the USSR was powerful, but a "distant second" compared with the US. As Thomas Lairson nicely put it,

hegemony better advances our understanding of the impact of the international system on policy choices. The concept of hegemony neither requires nor implies a unipolar system. Hegemony sees a world in which one power is significantly stronger than the rest and acts to establish an international order to its liking, but such a world does not preclude a challenger. Hence, post-1945 Europe was bipolar but in a very limited sense. At all points in the Cold War the Soviets were inferior to the United States, and the difference is even more pronounced when we add in various allies. Either the Americans nor the Soviets acted as if they saw such an equality. The United States was constantly augmenting and applying its military, economic, and political superiority; the Soviet Union was constantly backing down, shrinking from any real risk of war, and trying to catch up.

This is not to say that the US could not care less about the USSR, did not seek to contain Soviet power. In this light, the American postwar project was not only to contain the USSR. It was more than that. It was also to contain America's own allies, and above all to consolidate and perpetuate its hegemony. Thomas Paterson is right to suggest that, "Americans preferred to call their anti-Communism mission containment. But when it comes to expansion and containment, you can't have one without the other." Similarly, as Bruce Cumings points out, "the Cold War consisted of two systems: the containment project, providing security against both the enemy and the ally; and the hegemonic project, providing for American leverage over the necessary resources of our industrial rivals. Both the hegemonic project and the allied-containment system survive today." Therefore, Cumings continues, it is no surprise that "the United States can now be seen to be what it always has been since the 1940s—the only hegemon, the Great Britain of our time." In other words, the security dilemma fails to
explain the fact that both sides recognized each other's sphere of influence and, at times, even tacitly collaborated to "double-contain" any rising third power.

While professing postwar cooperation, the Big Three had fairly divergent postwar aims. Here the security dilemma theory, focusing on reaction and self-defense, shrouds the imperial ambitions of the great powers, especially the contributions of the United States and Britain to the origins of the Cold War. For example, when elite US policymakers like Dean Acheson used the rhetoric of "world responsibility" and talked about "power" they did not mean balance and diversity, rather a "preponderance of power" and hegemony. Acheson's Policy Planning Staff insisted, "The United States and the Soviet Union are engaged in a struggle for preponderant power... [T]o seek less than preponderant power would be to opt for defeat. Preponderant power must be the object of US policy."

Richard Barnet neatly captures a striking shortcoming of the mainstream approach: "most analyses of American foreign policy consider how to make the outside world safe for America...rather than how to make America safe for the world."

The exception was of course George Kennan, who envisaged a world with three independent and counterbalancing poles: the US, the USSR, and Europe. After expressing the elite Cold War consensus in 1946 (i.e., containment espoused by the "long telegram" and the "X" article), Kennan's influence in the Truman administration began to decline gradually. Thus, contrary to orthodox scholarship, Kennan is not the father of containment. Rather he merely helped make official the elites' declaration of the Cold War. It is worth pointing out that "six weeks before Kennan would send to Washington his famous 'long telegram' with its scathing analysis of Soviet behavior, and two months before Churchill would deliver his 'Iron Curtain' speech in Missouri, Truman had made his personal declaration of the Cold War."

If we use the concept of American hegemony to narrate the Cold War, the Americans sought to integrate "core" and "periphery" as world system theorists argue, and thus the latter has to be stabilized. By reorganizing the world's political economy, the United States acted like other hegemons in the past. "The global unit of analysis," Thomas McCormick argues, "helps overcome our often myopic preoccupation with Soviet-American relations and locate them inside a larger framework." McCormick continues,
The stress on long-term time and long-term process helps divest the Cold War of its mystique of uniqueness, so we can view it as part of the historical cycle of centering, decentering, and recentering that has been a patterned feature of the global system. The appreciation of hegemony as a rare yet recurring phenomenon of the system helps us understand, for example, the historical imperatives that led to the fight by the United States, as hegemon, to keep Southeast Asia inside the global market economy, less to serve America's own marginal interests than to serve the major interests of Japan and the larger systemic interests of world capitalism. 

Continuing with this logic, Immanuel Wallerstein contends that American hegemony during the Cold War rested on four pillars. The first was the reconstruction of the major industrial powers: the world economy needed the re-entry of these states as producers and as consumers of US goods; a network of associates to maintain the global politico-economic order was needed; and a prosperous "Free World" was needed for ideological reasons—e.g., to serve as hope for developing states, drawing them from communism. The second pillar was the military arrangements with the Soviet Union (e.g., peace in Europe, double containment of each bloc, tacit acceptance that each bloc was territorially fixed, etc.). The third was the recognition of US responsibility in the world system, which had to rely on anti-communism at home and abroad. And the fourth was the slow political decolonization in the Third World followed by the promotion of modest economic development there.

Melvyn Leffler argues that the periphery had to be stabilized and integrated into the American/Western orbit because otherwise the Kremlin might absorb the resources of this area to build a position of strength vis-à-vis the US. It was thus a "prudent" policy in reaction to potential or perceived Soviet threats. Leffler admits that, "For US policymakers, the problem in the aftermath of World War II was not so much Stalin's diplomatic behavior, which was contradictory and ambivalent, as an international system that appeared beyond the control of any government." Among other important factors, he points to the rise of leftist movements in various parts of the world, the demoralization of Japanese and German leaders, and the rise of nationalist impulses in Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and North Africa. But he is reluctant to portray the Cold War also as a North-South conflict—the Cold War as an American war against the Third World—as opposed to being merely an East-West one. Third World revolutions during the Cold War
may also be interpreted as anti-systemic struggles against the American politico-economic multilateralism, an order that was not infrequently maintained by the barrel of the gun.\textsuperscript{50} An illuminating example is Central America, where the American support of repressive regimes, maintenance of a system that perpetuated socioeconomic injustices, and willingness to employ counter-revolutionary means to squash radical movements contributed to short term American interest but ultimately made revolutions inevitable.\textsuperscript{51}

Though often depicted as America's "loyal lieutenant," Britain was also not coyly and passively waiting on the sidelines, seconding and buttressing US Cold War objectives. Some historians have argued that the British adopted the policy of containment well before the Americans; that is, that Britain gave impetus to the origins of the Cold War. For instance, Sean Greenwood contends, "The exposed position of Britain and its global possessions which engendered a heightened sense of anxiety drove them towards what was to be called containment before this had become settled policy in the United States and even to precipitate action before the purposes of the Soviet Union had been finely discerned."\textsuperscript{52}

Furthermore, up until 1949, Britain envisioned itself as the organizer of a "third force" (comprised of the Middle East, Western Europe, Africa, Britain, and its dominions) that would be independent of both Moscow and Washington.\textsuperscript{53} Britain and France would act as the nucleus of this third force. Since the end of 1945, Foreign Secretary Bevin had been talking about the world being divided into "three Monroes," with the British occupying the third sphere of influence, which was also dubbed "the middle of the planet."\textsuperscript{54} The exploitation of African colonies was an important key to the British imperial vision. According to one official, Ernest Bevin was hoping that if Britain "only pushed on and developed Africa, we could have US dependent on us and eating out of our hand in four to five years....US is very barren of essential minerals and in Africa we have them all."\textsuperscript{55} Greenwood sums up thus: "This potentially massive Third Force was seen as a way of containing Soviet expansion, escaping from the servitude of American economic domination, and restoring Britain's position as a full member of the Big Three as a prelude to the return to inter-Allied cooperation."\textsuperscript{56} By 1949, however, with the third force proving illusory, Britain's foreign policy tilted in the Atlantic direction.
Dropping the bomb

Whether or not the atomic bombs were really needed to end the Pacific War is still a heated issue. Traditional historians tend to argue that President Truman's decision to use the atomic bomb was regrettable but necessary. Representative of this view is Robert Ferrell:

The president's decision to use nuclear weapons, when it came, was based on two reasons. One was historical: the atrocities with which the Japanese began and thereafter conducted the war.... The other presidential reason for dropping the bombs...was the cost of invading the Japanese home islands, the sole remaining conventional military way to force a surrender. It seemed so high as to justify use of any new weapons in the American arsenal.\(^5^7\)

The new Cold War history suggests otherwise: "the consensus...is that the bomb was not needed to avoid an invasion of Japan and to end the war within a relatively short time. It is clear that alternatives to end the war existed and that Truman and his advisors knew it."\(^5^8\) Some of the alternatives to the bomb were a Soviet declaration of war on Japan and the modification of the unconditional surrender term. For instance, in his diary entry on 17 July 1945 Truman writes "He'll [Stalin] be in the Jap War on August 15th. Fini Japs when that comes about." However, on 25 July Truman suggests, "This weapon [the atomic bomb] is to be used against Japan between now and August 10th"\(^5^9\)—that is, before the USSR entered the war.

However, historians still argue why these alternatives were not tried, why the Americans decided to use the bomb instead. (Most however do agree that the atomic bombing of Nagasaki was completely unnecessary.) Arguments range from the desire to impress the Soviet Union and make Moscow more malleable to US postwar aims to ending the Pacific War solely on American terms. As Robert Messer put it, "the issue was no longer when the war would end, but how and on whose terms."\(^6^0\) Racism must also be taken into consideration: "In the United States and Britain, the Japanese were more hated than the Germans before as well as after Pearl Harbor.... They were perceived as a race apart, even a species apart—and an overpoweringly monolithic one at that."\(^6^1\) Of course, some still argue that the bomb saved the lives of American soldiers. However Gar Alperovitz notes

That saving lives was not the highest priority, however, seems obvious from the choices made in July [1945]: If the United States really wished
to end the war as quickly and surely as possible—and to save as many lives as possible—then as [George] Marshall had pointed out as early as June, the full force of the Russian shock plus assurances for the Emperor could not be left out of the equation.62

Whether or not the Soviet declaration of war on Japan and/or the modification of the unconditional surrender term would work must be examined from the Japanese side. Herbert Bix has argued that while recognizing that defeat was imminent, the Japanese unnecessarily delayed surrender for the preservation of the emperor system. Bix writes, “They waited, instead, until their foreign enemies had created a situation that gave them a face-saving excuse to surrender in order to prevent the kokutai from being destroyed by antimilitary, antiwar pressure originating from the Japanese people themselves.”63 The atomic bombs and the Soviet declaration of war provided the much-awaited face-saving excuse. It did not matter that hundreds of thousands of people must die in order to save the emperors’ skin. But Bix concludes thus:

Neither (a) American unwillingness to make a firm, timely statement assuring continuation of the monarchy, as [Joseph] Grew had argued for, nor (b) the anti-Soviet strategy in the stance of Truman and Brynes, who probably preferred use of the atomic bombs over diplomatic negotiation, were sufficient in and of themselves to account for the use of the bomb, or for Japan’s delay in surrendering. Rather, Emperor Hirohito’s reluctance to face the fait accompli of defeat, and then to act decisively to end hostilities, plus certain official acts and policies of his government, were what mainly kept the war going, though they also were not sufficient causes for the use of the bomb. In the final analysis, what counted on the one hand was not only the transcendent influence of the throne but the power, authority, and stubborn personality of its occupant, and on the other the power, determination, and truculence of Harry Truman.64

It is also accepted that Truman (an inexperienced president yearning to make a good debut in the international scene and secure his place in history) and Brynes practiced atomic diplomacy vis-à-vis the USSR at the Potsdam conference and the subsequent council of foreign ministers. In fact, Truman deliberately delayed the Potsdam meeting to make it coincide with the final phase of the development of the atomic bomb.65 Both the practice of atomic diplomacy and the decision to use the bomb by Truman and Brynes deviated from the consensus among US top policymakers. Here the contrast with secretary of war Henry Stimson, another admirer of the atomic bomb, is illuminating. According to
Stimson's recent biographer, "Stimson sought to ensure that the final success of the bomb did not create a situation in which differences with the Soviet Union could lead to permanent break in the Grand Alliance." In other words, "for Stimson, the atomic bomb was a means of pursuing negotiations and cooperation with the Soviet Union. This was a very different view from that being developed and practiced by Brynes and eventually by Truman."

Though outwardly unperturbed by the atomic diplomacy, Stalin greatly speeded up the Soviet nuclear program after Hiroshima. Perhaps it took Hiroshima to make Stalin see the bomb as a major factor in postwar relations. Anyhow, Stalin had to maintain an air of indifference or had to be even more adventurous lest the USSR be accused of caving in to American atomic diplomacy.

Sovietization of Eastern Europe

There are several attempts to explain the sovietization or communization of Eastern Europe. It must be remembered that in late 1944 Stalin envisaged Europe composed of three zones, with Eastern Europe as the communist zone; the other two zones being a stable, non-communist Western Europe and an intermediate zone in East-Central Europe where the USSR would exercise only loose control. Mainstream scholars argue that the sovietization in Eastern and East-Central Europe began from 1945—hence the iron-curtain metaphor and the need to contain the USSR. Other scholars have tried to offer a more nuanced analysis.

Offering the standard mainstream approach, Hugh Seton-Watson has argued that the road to the communization of Eastern Europe followed this trajectory: genuine coalition to bogus coalition to outright sovietization. Seton-Watson contends that the USSR initially promoted genuine coalitions to appease Western sentiments. Genuine coalitions soon gave way to bogus coalitions—coalitions only in name as the communists really dominated. Sovietization became a reality in 1947—the turning point in Soviet foreign policy towards Eastern Europe, which was propelled by the rising tension with the West due to the Cold War. Seton-Watson seems to suggest that sovietization had always been on Stalin's mind.

However, it is certainly inadequate to demonstrate that the Soviets (and totalitarianism) effectively seized control of Eastern Europe because the Red Army liberated the region. To gain a better understanding, we
first need to look at how the Nazi occupation of Eastern Europe during the war and the impacts of the war itself facilitated the extension of Soviet hegemony in the region. For example, the Nazis reoriented Eastern Europe away from Western Europe, imposed economic autarky in the region, and implemented a division of labor that made it subservient to Reich interests. The USSR merely took over these organized structures. We also need to recognize that the left and communists were quite popular in the area due to their role in the resistance movement—as reflected by electoral results in the early postwar months. In addition, as mentioned above, we need to understand the agreements or understanding reached between the great powers during and immediately after the war. Finally, we must examine the two phases in which the Kremlin extended its power into the region. It is now widely recognized that Soviet foreign policy towards Eastern Europe followed two rather distinct phases, and that the Seton-Watson thesis is open to challenge.

The first phase (1944–7) is often called the “democratic interlude,” when there was diversity in the region—e.g., different roads to socialism. The Soviets merely sought domination in this phase. The iron curtain had yet to fall. According to Geoffrey Swain and Nigel Swain, in the first phase there was political diversity in the bloc. Poland and Romania were sovietized from the moment that the Red Army liberated them from Nazi rule. Stalin wanted direct control in both countries and made sure that the communists held the mantle of power. These two cases do not fit the Seton-Watson thesis. In Hungary and especially Czechoslovakia there was the so-called “democratic interlude” with genuine coalition governments and multi-party democratic political systems. Initially, Stalin was happy for the communists and the USSR to have only influence but not power in coalition governments. Yugoslavia, Albania, and Bulgaria were also sovietized from the outset. But sovietization was carried forward wilfully and happily by the Balkan communists themselves. Moreover, their model of sovietization was not the USSR but Yugoslavia. It seemed that the communists were strongest in the Balkans where they came to power by themselves. The revolution in the Balkans had gone too far for Stalin to stop. Thus sovietization did not guarantee Soviet domination—unlike in Poland and Romania. The Balkan communists respected Stalin and the USSR but perhaps also wanted to pursue an independent foreign policy. Persuading Tito to act cautiously vis-à-vis the US and the West was a primary concern of Stalin. Again these countries did not fit the thesis. That there was political diversity in
Eastern Europe suggests that Stalin had no coherent plan for the region. In the second phase (from 1947) the USSR sought to Stalinize the region, bringing an end to political diversity. According to a recent study, this was primarily a reaction to the Marshall Plan and to a lesser extent the brewing schism between Tito and Stalin. (Some historians argue that the USSR was going to Bolshevize the region sooner or later. However, the Marshall Plan made it sooner rather than later.) The Marshall Plan was devised in a way that would guarantee Soviet rejection, primarily because the Plan stated that if the USSR and Eastern Europe wanted to receive aid they must participate in the European-wide division of labor and their markets must be integrated with those of Western Europe. In other words, Eastern Europe would be absorbed economically by Western Europe. Stalin saw the plan as a challenge to his control or domination of the region—which was still tenuous. Poland and Czechoslovakia applied for aid, but the USSR forced them to back down.

In other words, the real political transition happened in Czechoslovakia and Hungary, the two countries that had more or less democratic and multi-party political systems. Again, these two countries do not fit the Seton-Watson thesis—they jumped immediately from genuine coalition to communism. And ironically democracy was crushed in Hungary and Czechoslovakia because of the Marshall Plan. As William Hitchcock comments, "the reason for the eventual rise of Communism to power in these two states lies chiefly in the international politics of the postwar period up to 1947.... The announcement of the Marshall Plan in June 1947 was the critical turning point for both these countries...leaving no doubt that Stalin saw the Marshall Plan as a direct threat to his informal rule in Eastern Europe."

Happening almost simultaneously with the Marshall Plan was the Tito-Stalin dispute. Tito wanted to respond to Marshall Aid with a revolutionary counter-offensive. At first Stalin supported Tito's call for worldwide revolution because he wanted to consolidate his control over Czechoslovakia and Hungary. But when Tito (and Bulgaria) supported the communists in Greece, Stalin possibly feared that it would lead to an unwanted confrontation with the US.

As a reaction to the Marshall Plan the USSR established the COMINFORM to rally the communist parties of Europe to reject the Marshall Plan and to consolidate communist control in Eastern Europe—not really to expand the doctrine worldwide as often alleged.
The COMECON was created to ensure the economic subservience of Eastern Europe to the USSR. Purges were instituted throughout Eastern Europe—less so in Poland and Romania and more in Czechoslovakia and Hungary and in the Balkans.

**Protecting the US sphere of influence in Latin America**

If Latin America is—and has long been—an American sphere of influence, how could the US deny the Soviet Union a sphere of influence in Eastern Europe? If the US could reserve the right to unilaterally intervene in Latin America, how could it deny the Russians the very same right? The problem was twofold: (1) how to preserve the right to act unilaterally and to prevent foreign influence or intervention (e.g., by the United Nations or the USSR) in the region while (2) denying the same right to the USSR in its “sphere.” FDR’s secretary of war Henry Stimson tried to take the bull by the horns, clumsily suggesting

...we have been a pretty active old Uncle Sam in stopping things, and I think we ought to continue to be. I think you ought to be able to prevent Russia from using that thing in her...alleged parallel position. It isn’t a parallel to it. She’s no such an overwhelming gigantic power from the ones which she’s going to make a row about as we are here and on the other hand our fussing around among those little fellow[s] there doesn’t upset any balance in Europe at all. That’s my answer. It doesn’t upset any balance there where she may upset a balance that affects us.77

According to Gabriel Kolko, this problem was partly solved by the legislation of the UN Charter. The need to act unilaterally was cloaked in the name of “collective self-defense” as witnessed in Article 51. Kolko points out further,

Another clause, Article 52, legitimized ‘regional arrangements’ intended for the ‘maintenance of international peace’, and this every major power could use. But Article 53 banned them all by stating, 'But no enforcement action shall be taken under regional arrangements or by regional agencies without the authorization of the Security Council....' Although the Russians cited Article 53, the West only Article 51, in later years, the existence of the veto over Security Council actions meant that the United States-sponsored regional system would be operative when the Security Council could not be, and perhaps even if it acted. The United Nations gave the partial division of the world into
spheres of influence and competing blocs a formal legal structure, and thus the Great Powers both created and acknowledged reality.\textsuperscript{78}

The Organization of American States (OAS) was of course subsequently established in 1948.

If there was political diversity or a democratic interlude in Eastern Europe (at least in Czechoslovakia and Hungary) in the immediate postwar years, a similar phenomenon occurred in Latin America. The democratic interlude in most countries of Latin America was briefer than in Eastern Europe however—ending in 1944, 1945, or 1946 depending on the countries involved. The first period “was characterized by three distinct but interrelated phenomena: democratization, a shift to the left, and labor militancy.”\textsuperscript{79} Dictatorship fell, popular forces were mobilized, and elections were held with wide participation. Progressive parties including those from the left gained unprecedented support from the middle class and working class. There was an increase in unionization and strikes. The victory of the Allies in the Second World War was the principal factor that led to democratization and the downfall of dictatorship in the first phase—the war was the victory of democracy over fascism. Since the USSR was part of the Allies, the local communist parties earned greater popularity and respectability. Democracy was associated with development and welfare for the masses—a vision championed by the left. Development meant propping up trade barriers, import substitution industrialization, an interventionist state, welfare provision, etc.—the very antitheses of the American economic agenda. Furthermore, this kind of development might reduce or sever the region’s historical economic dependency on the US.

The first phase soon gave way to the second in most countries—the worsening of US–Soviet relations provided the necessary context. Communist parties in Latin America were virtually eliminated as a viable political force, undermining the thesis of the communist threat to the region.\textsuperscript{80} Labor unions were cracked down on. The old guards, aware of general US approval, consolidated their power. The dominant classes and the military had not been weakened or destroyed by the end of the Second World War. They were merely forced into the defensive at the war’s end. By 1946, they had reasserted their power vis-à-vis the left, labor unions, and other dangerous classes, undermining democratic development. “[A]fter 1945–46, the US did little to promote or even defend democratic principles and practices in Latin America.”\textsuperscript{81} In a few countries like Guatemala and Costa Rica, democracy survived.
During the Second World War, many Latin American governments collaborated with the US, hoping to salvage postwar economic aid. But at the end of the war, US interests turned elsewhere, especially to Western Europe and Japan. Unlike Western Europe, there was no Marshall Plan for Latin America. Between 1945 and 1950, the US gave only $400 million to Latin America, which was a pittance by any standard. Note that Greece and Turkey got $400 million in 1947 after the declaration of the Truman Doctrine. And Western Europe got some $14 billion dollars in Marshall aid. The US argued that Latin America governments must rely on private American capital for financial aid or assistance. In other words, they had to create stability and attract foreign investment. This meant cracking down on the left and labor unions—the working class had to be brought firmly under control.

In large part, the US supported the restoration of the old order because the conservatives and militarists, in contrast to the left and popular movements, had no wish to disengage from or reduce dependency on the regional economic system that was dominated by the United States since they profited from such dependency and economic integration. After the Second World War, Central America in particular was further locked into one-or-two crop economies, a textbook case of dependency theory. For example, of Guatemala’s $50 million in exports during 1948, $42 million were coffee and bananas. Central American countries also became increasingly dependent on the US market for exports. In 1948, $45 million of Guatemala’s $50 million went to the US; El Salvador, $35 million of $46 million; Honduras, $14 million out of $20 million; Nicaragua $20 million out of $27 million, etc. Imports dependence on the US further increased. In 1948, 82 per cent of Guatemala’s imports came from the US—up from 40 per cent in 1938; approximately 80 per cent of Costa Rica’s imports were American, up from 46 per cent in 1938. Moreover, in Latin America only a small faction in these countries benefited from the exports. As a result, only that group had the purchasing power to consume many of the imported goods. This structural violence—forcefully maintained by local and American elites—served as fuel for revolution.

Contrary to popular belief, it was thus really the threat of economic nationalism (e.g., using your resources for your own development instead of subordinating them to the American-dominated system) and poverty, and not of communism that concerned the United States in the immediate postwar years. Besides, American involvement and intervention in Latin America have deep historical roots and predated the
The roots of intervention, Walter LaFeber observes in *Inevitable Revolutions*, were based on principles that made the US the world's greatest power: racial superiority, "confidence in capitalism, a willingness to use military force, a fear of foreign influence, and a dread of revolutionary instability." How interested was the USSR in promoting communist revolutions or challenging the US in Latin America after the Second World War? Prior to 1959—after the success of the Cuban revolution—the USSR had very limited interest in the Western Hemisphere. Cuba showed that a socialist revolution in the Western Hemisphere was possible. The Russians recognized that the region fell in the US sphere of influence and that it was too geographically far from the USSR and too close to the US. And Latin American ruling elites were generally hostile to the USSR. The revolution in Guatemala was crushed or overturned by a CIA organized coup d'état in 1954. Much of the relationship between Latin America and the USSR was limited to the commercial realm; but even that was limited because of the lack of economic complementarity between the two regions. "Not until the late 1960s that the Soviet Union began to build a relatively stable and extensive network of diplomatic links in the sub-continent," Miller relates. Furthermore, between 1954 and 1978 Latin America received only 5.6 per cent of Soviet economic aid to the non-communist World; and only 2.5 per cent of Soviet military deliveries to the Third World. In conclusion, Soviet policy towards Latin America was conditioned by whether it wanted to appease, challenge, or provoke the US—and not by expansionism.

Cole Blasier argues that in Latin America "the United States tended to respond flexibly to rebel movements but then hostilely to changes instituted by reformist governments." Why? Though the instituted reforms might have truly benefited the masses (e.g. resulting in the restructuring of relationship between classes) they were often adverse to private US business and systemic interest—e.g., land reforms. Thus Washington's initial reaction might have been dictated by economic concerns. Since US interests in Latin America were so pervasive, any meaningful reform required the realignment of relations with the United States—was necessarily anti-American. At this stage, Washington began to think in strategic terms—in this case, Cold War considerations. Washington feared the loss of its political influence and credibility in the hemisphere. It feared the loss of access to strategic minerals and raw materials necessary to wage the Cold War. It was afraid that Moscow might establish a beachhead in the hemisphere. It feared the threat of a
good example or the demonstration effect (especially, a small state breaking free from the US orbit, while at the same time improving the lives of its citizens; the smaller and weaker the revolutionary regime, the greater the threat to the status quo). And so on. And the US was of course a counter-revolutionary state, a status quo power.

The division of Germany

To some historians, the division of Germany was a—if not the—major cause of the Cold War; that is, it was based on reasons other than Cold War considerations. To others, it was the consequence of the US-Soviet postwar rivalry. However, recent historians tend to agree that the division of Germany was largely an American/Western initiative. Some argue that Britain was more responsible in bringing about German division than the US. Of course, they haggle over the reasons for the division, with two main lines of argument. On the one hand are those who argue that the division resulted because of geopolitical and security interests. It was regrettable but inevitable. The American and British leaders feared that the continuation of the four-power control of Germany would enable the USSR to sabotage German recovery (e.g., the Soviet demand for reparations and participation in the control of the rich Ruhr) and thus would weaken the Western alliance (making Western Europe less immune to communist expansion) and that a weakened and neutral unified Germany might gravitate into the Eastern bloc. A divided Germany was preferred over a unified communist one. On the other side are those who emphasized that the plan to recover and divide Germany preceded the Cold War: early on, Germany was seen as an industrial workshop that would help to revitalize or expand international capitalism. On this view, American/Western leaders felt that German unification was never an end in itself from the outset. Rather, the end was whether division or unification would better serve US/Western interests. And there was a feeling that an industrially revived Germany was less threatening than the Soviet Union.

Carolyn Eisenberg best expresses this view:

Underpinning [the Americans'] willed paranoia was a more realistic concern that even the Soviets' minimum agenda would be disruptive to Western European recovery. If Germany shipped free industrial products to the east, if Ruhr coal was utilized for this purpose, if there were renewed attacks on compromised business leaders, if there was a ceiling on large enterprises, if labor unions had more power, if the
Soviet Union had a voice in Ruhr decision-making—such things would complicate Germany's economic integration into Western Europe. It was easier to shut off dialogue while faulting the adversary for intransigence.\textsuperscript{90}

A number of recent studies tend to confirm that the USSR had no coherent plan to divide Germany.\textsuperscript{91} It had the most to gain from the continuation of the four-power control; this would allow Moscow a foothold in the industrial and coal-rich Ruhr, for instance. One historian even argued that Stalin feared an American unilateral military withdrawal from Europe in general and from Germany in particular: alone the USSR would not be able to root out fascism from Germany.\textsuperscript{92} The USSR also demanded heavy reparations—some $10 billion—a policy the West found threatening. James Brynes even conceded in his memoirs that, "During all the consideration of the German question at Yalta, reparations were the chief interest of the Soviet delegation."\textsuperscript{93} Brynes failed to mention that this was also the Soviet stance during the Potsdam meeting, and that he had assiduously worked to deny German reparations to the Soviet Union through the use of atomic diplomacy because they could be detrimental to Western European recovery.\textsuperscript{94}

The British government eagerly worked alongside the Americans in denying a Soviet foothold in the industrial Ruhr, a central concern that contributed to German division. Sean Greenwood writes,

The fact is, however, that Bevin had set his mind against the Soviets playing anything other than a marginal role in the operation of the Ruhr industries from the start. His preference was to keep them out altogether. He expressly told the French and the Belgians that "it was a mistake to refer to the 'internationalization' of the Ruhr since this implied Russian participation. He thought it important that the Ruhr should come within the orbit of the Western European countries and that it would be linked up closely with their economies and made to serve the common good."\textsuperscript{95}

Thus the 1948–9 Berlin Blockade may be seen as a Soviet attempt to force the Western powers to abandon their plan to divide Germany and to create a rejuvenated state allied to the West. Some historians argue that the USSR wanted a weakened, unified, and neutral Germany. Some insist that Moscow did not worry about the Western powers’ regrouping of their zones as long as an independent western German state was not created. Some argue that the USSR was relieved that Germany was double-contained by the US.
The Russians did not want war as orthodox historians have argued. The West’s airlift was a success because the Soviets never closed off the air routes. Nor did they impose a total blockade. Arnold Offner neatly captures this new consensus:

In sum, if the Soviets had intended to “win” the Berlin contest, their best opportunity would have been at the outset, when they might have imposed an absolute blockade that would have sharply reduced the time available for the West to organize its airlift—which ultimately supplied only 91 percent of western Berlin’s food needs and 78 percent of its coal requirements—and build morale. But Stalin clearly was unwilling to risk war. As the French military command noted on June 24, 1948, the Anglo-American “attitude is based on absolute certainty that the Russians do not want war.”

Stalin’s Berlin gamble failed and served as an important pretext for the division of Germany.

But German economic revival was also threatening to the Europeans. A recent study using materials from the French archives contends that Paris went along with the Anglo-American decision to divide and revive Germany not really out of fear of Soviet expansionism (the French like the US and Britain feared Soviet exploitation of the Ruhr and presence in the Rhineland) but out of interest in containing and shaping Germany through European integration. Only by going along with the US policy could Paris sabotage or mold it to serve French interests. Thus the subsequent Schuman Plan and the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) not only reflected the French but also the European desire and means of controlling the Germans.

*Europe and America: empire by invitation?*

From available evidence including intelligence reports, American leaders did not really fear a Soviet invasion of Western Europe. US policymakers were concerned about the general leftward tilt in Western Europe and its ravaged economies and societies. Such was the perfect breeding ground for communism and radicalism, they believed. Western Europe was one of the “grand areas” and Germany was considered as one of the industrial workshops of the world. In order to create a world that would be safe for America (i.e., where the US could exercise a preponderance of power), the region had to be rejuvenated and integrated into Pax Americana. The Truman doctrine expressed American (political) commitment in the postwar world, especially to
"contain" the USSR and reshape the world. The Marshall Plan was the economic dimension of this commitment, while NATO was the military one. The US promoted European integration (read, the division of Europe) in order to realize its major economic, ideological, and geopolitical objectives. It wanted to control Western Europe, and not simply promote integration for the sake of the Europeans. (The US had no territorial ambition in Europe. The imperial creed rests on law making, on setting the boundary of expressible or independent action.) Europe was to be strong, but not as an independent third force. Integrated Europe had to fit within the wider Atlantic framework. As the historian Geir Lundestad observes, "Somehow Europe was to be both independent of and dependent on the United States at the same time."98

Lundestad then argues that the five main reasons why the Americans supported or promoted European integration—in ascending order of importance—were: 1) to promote the US "corporatist" system as a model; 2) to create a more rationally organized and efficient Europe; 3) to reduce the burden on the US, especially the financial costs; 4) to contain the USSR; and 5) to contain Germany.99 Thus the Marshall Plan was an attempt to revive and enmesh the German economy with the other European states (with France in particular), and to reorient the German economy away from Eastern Europe.100 And NATO was the military tool to tie Germany down within the broader Atlantic framework and to pacify America's European allies about German economic recovery.

Did the Europeans invite the American empire as some prominent historians suggest?101 The arguments really go both ways. During the Cold War, the American empire was certainly more benign in Europe than in many other parts of the world. Witness the promotion of economic recovery and integration. On the flipside, did the Europeans really cherish being under American hegemony? France certainly did not. And up to 1949, Britain was planning to reorganize Europe as a third force to countenance America and the USSR. Can European integration also be interpreted as a means of counter-balancing American hegemony? A recent study shows that European attitudes towards the US during the Cold War were at best ambiguous. It can even be said that "dissatisfaction with America affected...the European integration process" for "by coming together, the Europeans might be able to provide something of a counterweight to American power within the Western alliance." Thus during the Cold War "the Europeans needed to balance between...two aims: reaching for greater autonomy and
maintaining ties with the United States." According to Trachtenberg and Gehrz, the American pressure for German rearmament against European wishes in late 1950 contributed to the idea that a counterweight to American power was needed in the Atlantic alliance, and the nucleus of that counterweight had to be centered around France and Germany.

The empire by invitation thesis in part rests on the assumption of American benevolence, especially manifested in the form of the Marshall Plan. The traditional view is that Marshall aid was instrumental in postwar European recovery. This view has been much challenged. Alan Milward has argued that the impact of this aid on European recovery was negligible, that it was not necessary after all. Europeans themselves should be given the most credit for saving themselves. William Hitchcock concurs with Milward's findings: "In narrowly economic terms, the contributions of the Marshall Plan to Europe's industrial recovery were small, and in fact a significant recovery was already under way before the Marshall aid arrived in Europe." But Hitchcock adds a twist: "What Marshall aid did do was allow European states to continue along a path of industrial expansion and investment in heavy industry down which they had already started, while at the same time putting into place a costly but politically essential welfare state." Put differently, the aid enabled the Europeans to embark on economic Keynesianism and to pursue politico-economic options they might not have chosen in the first place, but options that were needed if they wanted to save themselves. Historians have also pointed out that the Marshall Plan helped reorganize industrial and economic policies along corporatist lines in Europe, facilitating European integration.

The role of Asia

Like in Europe, the US had no territorial ambition in Asia. Worse, it had no direct economic interest in the region. Back then the US deemed the Middle East as the most important region of the Third World. Mainstream scholarship tends to situate the extension of Pax Americana into the Far East in the context of US–Soviet global rivalry; that is, the American empire in the Far East was essentially a defensive one designed "to prevent an extension of the influence of the Soviet Union and Communist China." However, containment in Asia began prior to the Soviet explosion of an atomic device, the communist victory in China, and the outbreak of the Korean War, suggesting possible ulterior
motives. Aside from the need to protect credibility and maintain military bases in the region, what contributed to American commitment in Asia was thus the region's importance to the two industrial workshops of the world: Japan and Germany/Western Europe; both needed outlets for their goods and reliable sources of raw materials for the sake of economic recovery—vital for the revival of international capitalism.\textsuperscript{109} In other words, the US intended to integrate "core" and "periphery."

By 1948 US policymakers reversed course in Japan and treated Tokyo as the "superdomino" (a term coined by John Dower) and the jewel of the "Great Crescent," an arc running from Northeast Asia to Southeast Asia to Iran. When China was about to turn red, the US deemed industrial Japan the primary regional ally.\textsuperscript{110} Schaller observes,

The Truman Administration acknowledged that America had no practical solution for China's internal problems. Nor, officials realized, would the outcome of the civil war affect, in any fundamental way, US security. Instead, Washington policymakers refocused their attention on the need to reconstruct the economies of Western Europe, Germany, and occupied Japan.... China was too weak, backward, and irrelevant to justify a further commitment of American resources.\textsuperscript{111}

Countries in the Great Crescent were to be economically linked with, if not subordinated to, Japan, facilitating Tokyo's economic reconstruction under American hegemony.\textsuperscript{112} However it was the Korean War that lifted the Japanese economy from recession, in the short run at least.\textsuperscript{113}

This subordinate, cooperative, regional role is not new for Japan. As Bruce Cumings observes, "Japan for this entire [20th] century has been a subordinate partner in either bilateral American hegemony or trilateral American–British hegemony."\textsuperscript{114} The only exception was the period 1941–5, when the Japanese sought to create "a meaningful role in world affairs" by establishing "a new Asian order, which to many of them meant that they were finally being liberated from Western influence."\textsuperscript{115}

Commitment to Western Europe also brought the US to expand to Asia. Asia was important to Western European recovery. "The United States," Andrew Rotter explains, "offered economic and military aid to the nations of Southeast Asia in May 1950, in part because Great Britain asked it to."\textsuperscript{116} Southeast Asia was crucial for British and European reconstruction. Britain wanted to stabilize Southeast Asia in order to maintain the triangular trade between Britain, the United States, and the underdeveloped sterling countries and offset its dollar deficit. Leffler
writes, "US officials recognized the importance of integrating the industrial core of Europe (and of Japan) with the underdeveloped periphery in Asia and Africa. Europe's dependent overseas territories were included by definition in the bilateral agreements that the United States signed with each European recipient of assistance [i.e., the Marshall Plan]." Bruce Cumings nicely sums up: "The true captains of the American Century were those who thought in both/and terms: Europe and Asia, the open door and partnership with imperial Britain, intervention in both Latin America and Europe, a world economy with no ultimate limit."

So the US in turn needed "dependable" allies in these countries—even brutal and undemocratic ones. Communism must be denied a grip in the region. However, this vision also flew in the face of the numerous radical, decolonization, and nationalist movements in the region that opposed external domination. The American attempt to reorganize the political economy of the region (i.e., the concept of the Great Crescent) partly explains the US involvement in the Korean conflict, its attitude towards the nationalist movements in Indochina (and in the Third World in general), and the origins of the Indochina wars.

**Moscow and Mao**

Contrary to popular belief, the signing of the alliance treaty between China and the USSR was not a forgone conclusion even in early 1950, even when Mao had declared his "lean-to-one-side" policy. Always suspicious and paranoid, Stalin wavered till the very last minute. Mao lingered in Moscow waiting to sign a treaty with Stalin for over a month. On the one hand, Stalin perhaps did not expect the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to emerge victorious in the civil war and was skeptical of every independent communist movement. On the other hand, an alliance with Mao meant that Stalin would have to make modifications in the 1945 treaty signed with the Guomindang. Soviet interests might be hurt in that process, plus the USSR would have to provide the CCP with economic and military aid. A common ideology was not sufficient to tie the two sides together. But sharing a common enemy facilitated the process. (However the basis for any lasting alliance is similar or convergent perceptions of the enemy and individual policy priorities. As it turned out, this was not the case in Sino-Soviet relations.) The key country that helped to bind the USSR and China together was the United States. Stalin wanted to prevent a Sino-American rapprochement.
(which in retrospect was totally unnecessary), to double-contain China, and to maintain against Chinese will some of the Soviet rights guaranteed by the 1945 treaty with the Guomindang (e.g., railway and naval concessions in Manchuria). To Mao, the alliance provided China with aid and security guarantees against an American invasion. Stalin also promised to restore formal Chinese sovereignty in Manchuria. These measures would enable Mao to foster socialism at home (and as some have argued to restore the past glory of the Middle Kingdom). Overall, one historian observes, "The Chinese got less and sometimes much less than what they bargained for, but they got some form of agreement on all areas which were important to them." The Soviets on the other hand achieved a Pyrrhic victory: Stalin's tactics and skepticism were most unnecessary for drawing a wedge between the US and China and for establishing a lasting Sino-Soviet relationship—a tragic mistake that would ultimately come to haunt the USSR and affect the course of the Cold War. In other words, rather than solidifying a common image of the American enemy with China, Stalin planted the seeds of distrust between Beijing and Moscow, which ultimately culminated in the Sino-Soviet split in the late 1960s.

Chen Jian writes, "Mao's China was more revolutionary in its behavior than the Soviet Union by the late 1940s." Mao and the CCP leadership wanted to restore China's centrality in the international system by transforming China into a bastion of worldwide proletariat revolution. Of course, this role would make China a leading enemy of the world's reactionary forces, but external tension was also useful for domestic mobilization, for the continuous perfecting or purification of the revolution—of "continuous revolution." Chen Jian explains thus: "Mao and his comrades never regarded the Communist seizure of power in China in 1949 as the revolution's conclusion. Rather, Mao was very much concerned about how to maintain and enhance the revolution's momentum after its nationwide victory. Indeed, this concern dominated Mao's thinking during the formation of the People's Republic and would be a preoccupation during the latter half of his life." Continuous revolution would help determine China's domestic and international behavior during the Maoist era. However, it is important to keep in mind that

China's external behavior during the Maoist era was a contradictory phenomenon. Despite its tendency toward using force, Mao's China was not an expansionist power. It is essential to make a distinction
between the pursuit of *centrality* and the pursuit of *dominance* in international affairs in terms of the fundamental goal of Chinese foreign policy. While Mao and his comrades were never shy about using force in pursuing China’s foreign policy goals, what they hoped to achieve was not the expansion of China’s political and military control of foreign territory or resources—which was, for Mao and his comrades, too inferior an aim—but, rather, the spread of their influence to other “hearts and minds” around the world. Mao fully understood that only when China’s superior moral position in the world had been recognized by other peoples would the consolidation of his continuous revolution’s momentum at home be assured.\textsuperscript{125}

Mao’s continuous revolution would deeply impact his version of Marxist-Leninism, and contribute to the Sino-Soviet schism during the Khrushchev years; for instance, China’s domestic/revolutionary priorities fostered an international behavior the Soviet Union found unacceptable.

**The role of the Korean War**

The historical consensus is that the Korean War was simultaneously an international and a civil war.\textsuperscript{126} In other words, the Korean War cannot be understood apart from the civil war that had been raging since 1945. Another crucial consensus is that the decision to invade South Korea was largely the decision of Kim Il Sung. Stalin was reluctant to support the North Korean adventure. He consented to it on condition that it would not provoke an American counter-invasion and that Mao also supported the decision. When the war broke out, Stalin gave only limited material and moral support. The Chinese were undecided how far they were committed to it. When the US landed in Inchon, the Chinese leadership hesitated to fully commit Chinese troops (though Mao was pretty hawkish\textsuperscript{127}). In the end however, the Korean War gave Mao and China the chance to stand up to the perceived American imperialism (i.e., the attempt to reorganize the politico-economy of the region centering on Japan) and to project the image of Beijing as a regional liberator. It also provided Mao the opportunity to prove China’s worth and loyalty in the alliance (i.e., the new boy in the communist neighborhood had to prove himself). Furthermore, Soviet aid (however limited) during the war contributed to China’s ability to fight the US, and hence Mao could legitimize the decision to ally with the USSR. Thus by the war’s end, “Mao, as the mastermind of the war decision, began to enjoy political power inside China with far fewer checks and
balances than before."\textsuperscript{128}

Odd Arne Westad contends that for Stalin the war ultimately "became a surrogate for the all-out war with the West that he neither wanted nor was prepared for, a containable war in which he, through the Chinese war effort, could hit back at the United States for past setbacks in Europe, Japan, and the Middle East."\textsuperscript{129} The war also seemed to have driven a wedge between China and the US, which Stalin secretly desired; it made China more dependent on the USSR, at least in the short run. Moreover, the war proved that China was stronger than anticipated, and that Soviet eastern borders would be secured from an American geopolitical threat. Thus the war provided the Sino-Soviet alliance with a much more concrete image of the enemy than during the 1949–50 negotiations in Moscow.\textsuperscript{130}

As the image of the American enemy diverged over the decades, so too would Moscow and Beijing.

Did the perfidious communist action in Korea shock the ever law-abiding US, ultimately forcing Washington to triple its defense budget and extend its tentacles worldwide, especially in Asia, as traditional history states?\textsuperscript{131} Did not US troops pull out of Korea, insisting that the peninsula was strategically unimportant to the US? This is still an issue of great debate. Some revisionist historians argue that the US was itching for a foreign war in order to pass National Security Council memorandum Number 68\textsuperscript{132} (which predated the war; a public statement on and presentation of the new rearmament program to Congress was planned in early June 1950) and achieve other foreign and domestic policy objectives.\textsuperscript{133} In other words, American leaders secretly "invited" a North Korean invasion: "Not only did American leaders deliberately decline to rectify the changing military balance on the peninsula, but they also took steps to weaken South Korea's armed forces and convey public disinterest in South Korea's fate, even in the event of an outright invasion by the North."\textsuperscript{134}

It seems that despite Mao's victory in China, the Soviet explosion of the atomic bomb, and the forging of the Sino-Soviet alliance, many in the American establishment then felt that a large military budget (that would enable the US to meet these threats) was unwarranted. In fact, in the early 1950s, the faction advocating a small military budget was at the peak of its power.\textsuperscript{135} Some contend that although the Korean peninsula was strategically unimportant to the US, American credibility was at stake and South Korea was politico-economically important to Japan.\textsuperscript{136} And what was Japan's reaction to the outbreak of the Korean War? It is quite evident that the Japanese government never really feared the
imminent threat of Soviet or Chinese aggression against Tokyo. Despite American pressure, Tokyo stubbornly refused to embark on a massive rearmament program.\textsuperscript{137} In fact, the Japanese premier called the Korean War "the gifts of God." The American military procurements greatly contributed to the first Japanese economic boom in the postwar period. Another benefactor of the Korean War was the Guomindang regime in Taiwan. A few months prior to the outbreak of the war, several top US policymakers were toying with the idea of supporting a coup détente to remove Chiang Kai-shek and his group of followers: the US wanted the island minus the incumbent regime, which was seen as corrupt and inept. Come the Korean War and the plan was scrapped.\textsuperscript{138}

**Conclusion**

The story of the origins of the Cold War is inextricable from the story of the emergence of the postwar American empire. And it would necessarily impact our assessment of American foreign policy at the end of the Cold War. If we do not subscribe to the view that American internationalism during the Cold War was an aberration in US foreign policy (a reluctant shift from isolationism to internationalism) or that the postwar American empire was accidental—constructed in a fit of absent-mindedness—we need to critically ascertain whether or not there are continuities in US foreign policy in the wake of the Cold War. Are we moving from Pax Americana I to Pax Americana II? In other words, we need to pose the question—as Walter LaFeber has meticulously done—"An end to which Cold War?" ("An End to Which Cold War?" in Michael Hogan, ed., *The End of the Cold War: Its Meanings and Implications*, Cambridge University Press, 1992, pp. 13-19.) LaFeber argues that there are actually four interrelated Cold Wars in the period after the Second World War, and only one of them had ended. "The first Cold War," he notes, "involves the ongoing struggle, dating back at least to World War I and the Paris Peace Conference, between the United States and the European countries to determine the kind of Europe that should evolve, and to decide how great a role Americans will have in that determination."\textsuperscript{139} Central to this struggle is how to contain and co-opt Germany; the logic behind this policy is soon extended to Japan. The second Cold War is "the ongoing struggle between the world's commercial centers and the outlying countries that provide markets and raw materials."\textsuperscript{140} Put differently, this is a struggle to stabilize and reorganize the "periphery." The third Cold War, LaFeber continues, "has
been fought within the United States." It has been a war to ‘pacify’ the American public and curb the excesses of democracy, culturally, intellectually, economically, and politically in order to maintain the American hegemonic project. Lastly, and the only Cold War that had really ended, is the long confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union. Simply put, rethinking the origins of the Cold War and the rise of the postwar American empire will help us understand the empire-building project of the George W. Bush administration—that it is indeed not unprecedented, merely extreme.

Notes

4 For instance, see some of the essays in Michael J. Hogan, ed., The End of the Cold War: Its Meaning and Implications (Cambridge University Press, 1992), especially the one entitled ‘A view from below’ by Noam Chomsky, pp. 137–50.
9 See, for example, Thomas G. Paterson, Meeting the Communist Threat (Oxford UP, 1988), particularly chapters 2 and 3.
11 See, for instance, Walter Hixson, George F. Kennan: Cold War Iconoclast (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989); and Anders Stephanson, Kennan and the Art of Foreign Policy (London and Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard


15 For this view, see for example Amos Permuttter, *FDR and Stalin: A Not So Grand Alliance, 1943–1945* (University of Missouri Press, 1993).

16 As the results of the Tolstoy meeting suggest, Churchill was willing to recognize Soviet domination of Eastern Europe in exchange for Stalin’s recognition of Britain’s preeminent position in the Middle East and Mediterranean. See John Kent, ‘British policy and the origins of the Cold War,’ in Melvyn Leffler and David Painter, eds., *Origins of the Cold War: an International History* (Routledge, 1995) pp. 138–53.


24 Vladislav Zubok and Constantine Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin’s Cold War*
from Stalin to Khrushchev (Harvard UP, 1996).


29 Quoted in Zubok and Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War*, p. 47.


31 Nor were Soviet actions in the Mediterranean and the Middle East, which were simply a test of where the line of demarcation between East and West was to be drawn. To Trachtenberg it was Germany.


33 Garson, 'American foreign policy,' p. 151.


39 Thomas Paterson, *Meeting the Communist Threat*, p. 34.


41 Melvyn Leffler, *A Preponderance of Power: National Security, the Truman Administration and the Cold War* (Stanford University Press, 1992), pp. 18–9. This monumental work has become the staple of any course on US foreign policy and the early Cold War.


Leffler, *The Specter of Communism*, p. 49.


Greenwood, *Britain and the Cold War*, pp. 36, 52.


Greenwood, *Britain and the Cold War*, p. 52.


Herbert Bix, *Hirohito and the Making of Modern Japan* (HarperCollins
Rethinking the Cold War and the American empire


64 Bix, Hirohito, p. 520.


67 Schmitz, Henry L. Stimson, p. 188

68 For these ideas see David Holloway, Stalin and the Bomb (Yale University Press, 1994) and the essay 'Stalin and the nuclear age,' by Vladislav Zubok in John Lewis Gaddis, Philip H. Gordon, Ernest May, and Jonathan Rosenberg, eds., Cold War Statesmen Confront the Bomb (Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 39–61.


77 Quoted in Kolko, The Politics of War, p. 473.

78 Kolko, The Politics of War, p. 474.

79 Leslie Bethell and Ian Roxborough, 'Introduction: the postwar conjuncture in Latin America: democracy, labor and the left,' in Leslie Bethell and Ian Roxborough, eds., Latin American Between the Second World War and the Cold

80 Leslie Bethell and Ian Roxborough, 'The impact of the Cold War on Latin America,' in Leffler and Painter, eds., Origins of the Cold War, pp. 293–316. In mid 1948 the Policy Planning Staff of the State Department pointed out that "Communism in the Americas is a potential danger, but...with a few possible exceptions it is not seriously dangerous at the present time." The PPS underscored that the real dangers were structural: "poverty that is so widespread," "bare subsistence level for large masses of people," etc. See LaFeber, Inevitable Revolutions, p. 100.

81 Bethell and Roxborough, 'Introduction,' p. 23.

82 LaFeber, Inevitable Revolutions, pp. 93–4.


84 LaFeber, Inevitable Revolutions, p. 18.


89 See, for example, Trachtenberg, A Constructed Peace. Also see, John Lewis Gaddis, The United States and the Origins of the Cold War, 1941–1947 (Columbia UP, 1972), p. 331.


92 See Loth, Stalin's Unwanted Child.


94 Offner, Another Such Victory, chapter 4

95 Greenwood, Britain and the Cold War, p. 23.

96 Offner, Another Such Victory, p. 255.


Lundestad, "Empire" by Integration, p. 13.

On the shift in the geographic focus of German foreign economic relations see, for example, James Cronin, The World the Cold War Made: Order, Chaos, and the Return of History (Routledge, 1996), pp. 90–1.

John Lewis Gaddis, We Now Know, especially chapters, 2, 3, and 10; Geir Lundestad, "Empire by invitation" in the American century,' in Hogan, ed., The Ambiguous Legacy, pp. 52–91.


See, for example, Robert J. McMahon, The United States and Southeast Asia Since World War II (Columbia, 1999).

Initially, several key US officials were not alarmed by the fact that China went communist. Japan was a far more important country. Moreover, they believed they could drive a wedge between China and the USSR—through a combination of carrots and sticks. For example, they were only lukewarm towards the Chiang regime in Taiwan. Showing otherwise would make it more difficult to draw a wedge between China and the USSR. On the wedge strategy see Gordon Chang, Friends and Enemies: the US, China, and the Soviet Union (Stanford UP, 1990), chapters 1–3.


Under the American occupation, Japan underwent a "tightly controlled revolution" or a "bourgeois revolution." Well before the end of the occupation, a new conservative hegemony led by Yoshida Shigeru was consolidated in Japan, resting on bureaucracy, big business, and conservative political parties. See, for
example, John Dower, *Empire and Aftermath: Yoshida Shigeru and the Japanese Experience, 1878–1954* (Harvard East Asian Monographs 84, 1988), chapters 8–12. A similar revolution happened in western Germany. In other words, a "safe" form of democracy was promoted in both countries. We have to take this fact into consideration when confronting the argument that the US struggles for democracy worldwide. For a recent view that the US is an agent of democracy see Tony Smith, *America's Mission: The United States and the Struggle for Democracy in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton UP, 1994).

113 Aaron Forsberg argues that "Although the Korean War boom provided a powerful boost at a crucial time, it was also a highly disruptive force. By alienating the United States and the newly established People's Republic of China (PRC), the Korean War paved the way for the imposition of severe controls on trade that severed Japan's economy from the Asian mainland." As such the US had to press for increased Japanese access to the US market and for membership in GATT. Aaron Forsberg, *America and the Japanese Miracle: The Cold War Context of Japan's Postwar Economic Revival, 1950–1960* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000), p. 4.


119 One student of American intervention in the Third World argues, "What ...has been the threat to the diverse targets of American intervention which has brought down upon them the wrath, and often firepower, of the world's most powerful nation? In virtually every case involving the Third World... it has been in one form or another, a policy of ‘self-determination’: the desire, born of perceived need and principle, to pursue a path of development independent of US foreign policy objectives. Most commonly, this has been manifested in (a) the ambition to free themselves from economic and political subservience to the United States; (b) the refusal to minimize relations with the socialist bloc or suppress the left at home, or welcome an American military installation on their soil—in short, a refusal to be a pawn in the cold war; or (c) the attempt to alter or replace a government which held to neither these aspirations." See William Blum, *Killing Hope: US Military and CIA Interventions since World War II*


Chen Jian, *Mao's China*, p. 47.

Chen Jian, *Mao's China*, p. 15.


“Mao was almost the only person who consistently favored intervention” in the Korean War, see Chen Jian and Yang Kuisong, ‘Chinese politics and the collapse of the Sino-Soviet Alliance,’ in Westad, ed., *Brothers in Arms*, p. 254.


On the Sino-Soviet relations during and after the Korean War, see Westad, ed., *Brothers in Arms*; Chen Jian, *China's Road to the Korean War*; Chen Jian, *Mao's China and the Cold War*; and Goncharov, Lewis, and LiTai, *Uncertain Partners*.

This is more or less the stance of William Stueck, *The Korean War: An International History* (Princeton UP, 1995). Stueck further argues that without the Soviet support there would not have been the “international” Korean War.


See Fordham, *Building the Cold War Consensus*.

See, for example, Cumings, *The Roaring of the Cataract*.


LaFeber, ‘An end to which Cold War?’ p. 16.

LaFeber, ‘An end to which Cold War?’ p. 17.

LaFeber, ‘An end to which Cold War?’ p. 18.