

From Truman to Roosevelt Roundtable Review



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Review by Eduard Mark, Department of the Air Force

One of the central questions around which the controversy over the origins of the Cold War has developed is whether President Harry S. Truman and his advisers continued or reversed the policies with which Franklin D. Roosevelt had attempted to preserve the Grand Alliance. That question Wilson Miscamble has made the subject of an interesting new book. Professor Miscamble's answer, in brief, is that the Truman Administration strove in almost every way to continue Roosevelt's policies as its leading members understood them, although their efforts were certainly complicated by the failure of the deceased President to explain his plans to his Vice President or, for that matter, to anyone else. In their effort to forge a decent postwar relationship with the USSR, Professor Miscamble maintains, Truman and his advisers persevered sedulously – although not without tactical changes -- until Soviet actions forced them at length to reconsider matters. He finds the point of inflection not in the first days or weeks of Truman's succession, but in the late summer of 1946 when Soviet pressures on Turkey persuaded the President and most of his advisers that a firmer policy toward the Soviet Union was required. Even then, however, there was no clean break with the policy of attempting to find common ground with the Soviets, which lingered fitfully into 1947, when a disillusioned George C. Marshall returned from the Conference of Foreign Ministers convinced that it was Moscow's policy to allow Europe to lapse into ruin.

Eduard Mark works as a historian for the U.S. Air Force in Washington, D.C. He has been writing about the Cold War for much longer than he cares to remember. He is currently writing a classified history of planning for nuclear war in the first decade of the Cold War. This work is a companion to a volume already completed and now undergoing declassification review entitled "*A Gloomig Peace: The Grand Strategy of the United States and the Defense of Western Europe, 1946-1954*." On his own time, he is working on a number of projects. One of them, undertaken in collaboration with Professor David Alvarez, is a comprehensive study of American intelligence in the early Cold War. The working title is "*Through a Glass, Darkly*": *American Intelligence and the Soviet Union in the early Cold War*.

Professor Miscamble, whom I am pleased to say I have long known, is a man of gentle disposition. But in the writing of this book he has engaged himself with a passion not often seen in a field of history which, more than many others, lends itself to a certain dryness. "Revisionism" – in this instance, the contention that Truman and his advisers quickly and with a will set themselves to reversing Roosevelt's policy of engagement with the Soviets – he would consign to condign oblivion in the "historiographical dustbin." (325) The passion Professor Miscamble brings to this task will impress – or nettle – readers scarcely less than the careful and scrupulous research with which he reconstructs the evolution of Truman's approach to the Soviet Union during first years in the White House.

In my view, the question of whether Professor Miscamble succeeds in his effort to demonstrate a fundamental continuity of intention between the Roosevelt and Truman Administrations admits of no simple answer. I hasten to add that, in my opinion, his

10 September 2007

demonstration that Truman and his inner circle fully intended to preserve the wartime cooperation with the Soviet Union, such as it was, is virtually conclusive. His conclusion might, however, have been shaded somewhat if he had looked into the activities of the military and the intelligence community. Whereas Truman, as Professor Miscamble's plausibly argues, continued to view the USSR into 1946 as troublesome ally, the Joint Staff viewed the USSR as a potential enemy by the fall of 1945, when consideration of war with the Soviet Union actively began. A similar view obtained in the War Department's interim intelligence organization, the Strategic Services Unit, by the first weeks of 1946.¹ It is fair to say, too, that diplomats tended to be somewhat less than sanguine when they contemplated future relations with the Soviet Union.

But, as I have said, Professor Miscamble's principal concern is Truman and his closest advisers, and the reservations of soldiers and intelligence officers had little practical effect on policy before the summer of 1946. (Those of the diplomats were another matter, but our author is not unaware of them.) The careful tracing of the evolution of the thirty-third president's stance vis-a-vis the Soviet Union on the whole tends to sustain the basic thesis of this book. Miscamble's critique, moreover, of various arguments to the effect that there was an abrupt and rather brutal abandonment of Roosevelt's policies are generally plausible. But I harbor withal reservations. These concern not so much the principal question to which the author has addressed himself as aspects of the interpretation of American and Soviet foreign policies that frame his inquiry.

I turn first to the portrayal of Franklin D. Roosevelt and his policy toward the Soviet Union. While Professor Miscamble is at pains to show that Truman conscientiously strove to continue the work of his predecessor, he is plainly of the view that this was not altogether to his credit: "Regrettably, the Truman Administration expended too much energy in 1945 and 1946 negotiating with the Soviets and, in a way, attempting to reassure and place them and to reach amicable settlements with them." (326) It is not, I think, unfair to say that Miscamble believes with Roosevelt's approach to the Soviet Union was on the whole foolish and misguided. Roosevelt, he writes,

Rather naively . . . relied on his hunches and intuitions and held the hope that he could civilize or domesticate the Soviet 'beast' and establish a personal connection with Stalin. Operating on this sad delusion, Roosevelt fashioned a strategy toward the Soviets based on personal connections and significant concessions aimed at reassuring them of his bona fides.²

¹ These are complicated matters that I cannot pursue further here. I deal with military planning in a completed work now wending its way through the process of declassification, *"A Gloomier Peace": The Grand Strategy of the United States and the Defense of Western Europe, 1946-1954*. David Alvarez and I are in the final stages of writing a study of intelligence in the early Cold War with the working title, *"Through A Glass, Darkly: American Intelligence and the Soviet Union and the Dawn of the Cold War*.

² *Ibid.*, 323.

10 September 2007

That these were elements of Roosevelt's policy is certainly true, but there was more. Whether FDR's agreement with Churchill that even the fact that the atomic bomb was under development should be withheld from Moscow bore any relation his Soviet policy is to the best of my knowledge uncertain, although I suspect that there was a connection at some level. But it is quite certain that he refused to discuss postwar economic aid to the Soviet Union at Yalta out of political calculation.³ It would have been provocative to tell the Soviets in so many words that aid was conditional upon their behavior, but FDR's silence on the subject spoke volumes, coming as it did immediately after a Soviet request for an enormous postwar credit. And, as has often been observed, Roosevelt could hardly have been clearer at Yalta about what he expected of the postwar elections in Poland. To couple that reminder with threats would have been highly impolitic when he was still seeking so much of the Soviets, particularly their participation in the war against Japan.

Also worthy of note are the constraints under which Roosevelt labored in dealing with the Soviets. Surely the most important of these was the danger that the Soviets would conclude a separate peace with Germany. The Soviets admitted at the Moscow Conference of Foreign Ministers in October 1943 that the Germans had approached them, and even before then Washington knew of contacts between the Soviets and the Germans in Stockholm. In October 1943, when Ambassador William Standley returned to the United States, Roosevelt asked him straightaway, "What do you think, Bill, will he [Stalin] make a separate peace with Hitler?"⁴ Just days before his death Roosevelt told Senator Arthur Vandenberg that throughout the war he had been under "the awful pressure of a fear that Russia would withdraw from the war and make a separate peace."⁵ Even now, none can say that this concern was not justified.⁶ Also important was the tenor of the military advice that Roosevelt received. Throughout the war the Joint Chiefs of Staff took the position that as the United States, even in alliance with Britain, could not win a war against the Soviets in Europe, and that concessions to Moscow were accordingly in order to obviate the possibility of such a catastrophe. These warnings the State Department placed in the

³ The Soviets having requested postwar credits, Secretary of the Treasury Morgenthau wished to take the matter up with them posthaste. Roosevelt would not hear of it, saying (as Morgenthau recalled) "Well, after all, we are not having any finance people with us and I will just tell them we can't do anything important until we get back to Washington I think it's very important that we hold this back and don't give them any promises of finance until we get what we want." Morgenthau was taken aback, telling Fleet Admiral William Leahy, "that both the President and Stettinius were wrong and that if they wanted to get the Russians to do something they should . . . do it nice . . . Don't drive such a hard bargain that when you come through it does not taste good." Blum, ed., *From the Morgenthau Diaries*, 3, *Years of War*, 305

⁴ William H. Standley and Arthur A. Ageton, *Admiral Ambassador to Russia* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1955), 498.

⁵ Arthur H. Vandenberg, Jr. and Joe Alex Morris, eds., *The Private Papers of Senator Vandenberg* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1952), 245.

⁶ It is perhaps significant that at last report the relevant portions of the diary of the Soviet ambassador to Sweden, Alexandra Kollontai, remain closed in the archive of the Foreign Ministry of the Russian Federation. All my efforts to gain access to them were summarily rebuffed, even in the heyday of archival *glasnost*.

10 September 2007

presidential briefing books prepared for both Yalta and Potsdam.⁷ And, in my judgment, they plainly had an effect on Roosevelt. A case in point was his concern that the United States should act as an “honest broker” between the British and the Soviets (which Professor Miscamble mocks) lest Anglo-Soviet rivalry for influence in Europe dangerously escalate derived from the warnings of his military advisers.⁸

Professor Miscamble does not much concern himself with such questions of *Realpolitik* because his perspective is informed by an ethical perspective rather than a concern with power and national interests. His position, if I am not mistaken, is that Stalin’s purposes were at once so obvious and so utterly malign that the concessions to Moscow were simply not in order, even consideration of them being evidence *prima facie* of delusion. I am of the view that the situation that confronted American policymakers in 1944 was rather more complicated than that. While in retrospect Stalin’s dedication to the cause of *ultimate* socialist revolution in Europe is not open to much doubt, that was not at all clear in 1945.⁹ To many contemporaries it seemed that the contradictions between socialism, as it was commonly understood, and Soviet practice were so glaring that Stalin simply could not be a Marxist of deep conviction.¹⁰ And if he was not a dedicated Marxist, then he might be

⁷ Memorandum JCS 838/1, Joint Secretariat to distribution, 6 May 1944, subj: “Disposition of Italian Overseas Colonies,” NARA, RG 218, Entry 421, ABC 092 Italy (27 April 1944) with handwritten corrigenda; Attachment to “American Policy Towards Spheres of Influence,” *FRUS: 1945: The Conferences at Malta and Yalta*, 106-108; Attachment to “British Plan for a Western European Bloc,” *FRUS, 1945: Conference of Berlin*, 1: 264-266.

⁸ The wartime stress of the Joint Chiefs upon the unwinnable nature of a European war against the USSR is worth of note because it indirectly underlines the complexity of the issue of “atomic diplomacy.” Professor Miscamble, in my view, ably disposes of what might call the classical version of that hypothesis as formulated by Gar Alperovitz *et al.* But that does not end the matter. I do not think that the use of the atomic bomb against Japan had much effect on Stalin. (He knew all about the Manhattan Project, after all, and would in all likelihood have been incredulous and contemptuous had the United States failed to use so puissant a weapon.) But the question of the use of the bomb against Japan has obscured what I regard as a more fruitful line of inquiry. The wartime warnings of the JCS were premised upon a war fought with conventional weapons. Such a war the United States, even in alliance with Britain, could hardly fail to lose. The Red Army was simply too big, and the Soviet Union’s proximity to the front would confer an almost insuperable strategic advantage. But the advent of the atomic bomb changed matters fundamentally. Only a year and a few months after the Joint Chiefs had warned of the impossibility of successful war against the USSR, the Joint Staff had developed a plausible strategy for waging victorious war against the USSR, the PINCHER concept, which depended entirely on the atomic bomb. In my view, the Cold War in Europe would not have developed as it did had the United States not obtained through the atomic bomb a way of waging war against the USSR. The wartime cautions of the JCS would likely have remained in effect, with some considerable effect on policy

⁹ I cannot recommend too strongly Erik van Ree’s *The Political Thought of Joseph Stalin* (London and New York: Routledge-Cruzon, 2002).

¹⁰ A fallacious argument, to be sure, akin to saying that Torquemada could not have been a sincere Christian because of certain obvious differences between the Inquisition and the Sermon the Mount. I have explored the significance of differing perceptions of Stalinism elsewhere: “October or Thermidor: Interpretations of Stalinism and the Perception of Soviet Foreign Policy in the United States, 1927-1947,” *The American Historical Review*, 94 (October 1989), 937-962.

10 September 2007

enough of a conventional *Realpolitiker* that national interest had a significant place in his calculations. Even upon this reading of Stalin there were dangers. Roosevelt himself *publicly* warned that “the trend from Marxism to nationalism in Russia” might portend an expansionism “no less disquieting than attempts at world revolution.”¹¹ But there was a basis for the hope that the USSR’s obvious need for a period of recuperation and a need for foreign aid might afford the possibility of a *modus vivendi*. As John D. Hickerson later recalled,

the Russians had suffered so much. Their casualties, the devastation in their country was terrific. We thought there would be a breathing spell when they’d be trying to rebuild their country. That doesn’t mean that I felt or my colleagues felt that the Russians has been converted to Christianity and that we thought they would permanently behave, but we thought it was so *clearly* in their interest.”¹²

The question of whether this calculation was wide of the mark is too complicated for discussion here. Suffice it to say, however, that Stalin himself, both privately and publicly, spoke of the preservation of the Grand Alliance as being in the interest of his Soviet Union.¹³ How could this have been, some readers will wonder at this point, if he also sought a Communist Europe? The contradiction is more apparent than real because the original wartime design was that the Communist parties should seek their way to power through “bourgeois democracy” – that is, by means to which the Western Allies could make no principled objection.¹⁴ To that end, there was a careful tailoring of policies, and even to many American observers the chances for success seemed fair or better.

¹¹ Forrest Davis, “What Really Happened At Teheran”, *Saturday Evening Post*, 215 (May 13, 1944), 12-13. This was a thinly disguised interview with Roosevelt, who reviewed the manuscript before publication and subsequently commended Davis for accurately stating his views. Forrest Davis to Steven Early, March 23, 1944, The Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Papers of Franklin D. Roosevelt, Official File, folder 4287; Roosevelt to Davis, June 14, 1944, *ibid*.

¹² Oral History Interview with John D. Hickerson 10 November 1972, 26 January and 5 June 1973, Harry S. Truman Library. (emphasis in the original).

¹³ Document No. 84, Unsigned cable (but Stalin’s) to Molotov, 1 June 1942 ,in O. A. Rzheshhevsky, *Voina I Diplomatiya: Dokumenty, Kommentarii (1941-1942)* (Moscow: Nauka, 1997), 192; Vladimir O. Pechatnov, “The Big Three After World War II: New Documents on Soviet Thinking about Post War Relations with the United States and Great Britain,” Cold War International History Project, Working Paper No. 13 (July 1995), 21. For the same thought from Molotov, see Felix Chuyev, *Sto Sorok Besed c Molotovim* (Moscow: Terra, 1991), 76 (entry of 15 August 1975).

¹⁴ For the evidence I refer readers to my paper “Revolution By Degrees: Stalin’s National-Front Strategy for Europe, 1941-1947.” Working Paper No. 31 of the Cold War International History Project. I am now expanding this article into a book with the working title *Revolution by Degrees: Stalin’s Strategy for the Political Conquest of Europe*. Geoffrey Roberts presents a similar argument in his important new book *Stalin’s Wars: From World War to Cold War, 1939-1953* (New Have: Yale University Press, 2006).

10 September 2007

Now this policy, the national front strategy as I have termed it elsewhere, did not succeed, nor did it long survive the war in anything like its intended form. The reasons for this are many but some of them bear directly on the thesis that it was from the first Soviet policy to fasten in short order police regimes upon the countries of Eastern Europe. The circumstances surrounding some of the first instances of Soviet “interference” in Eastern Europe are complex and remain little understood.¹⁵ Romania, for example, figures prominently in *From Truman to Roosevelt*, as an example of brutal intrusion. But when the Red Army entered that country, Stalin’s orders to his commanders were explicit:

“The entry of Soviet forces into Romania has been dictated exclusively by military necessity and does not pursue other goals other than the goals of overcoming and liquidating the continuing resistance of the enemy’s forces . . . To be preserved without change . . . are all existing Romanian organs of power and the system of economic and political organization existing in Romania. The performance of religious ceremonies is not to be hindered and houses of prayer are not to be touched. Romanian customs are not to be infringed and Soviet customs are not to be introduced.”¹⁶

As Percy Biddiscombe showed some years ago, the change in Soviet policy so evident in early 1945 had much to do with the discovery of a German-directed conspiracy involving the Romanian Army and the underground organizations of the Romanian Nazi Party and the Iron Guard.¹⁷ Recently declassified signals intelligence, moreover, shows that Anglo-American leaders not only knew of this plot but believed that elements of National Peasant Party – much the largest political organization in Romania – were complicit. The danger in Romania was discussed at the highest levels of the British and American governments, and largely explains why there was so little protest when the Soviets imposed a government of their choosing in March 1945.¹⁸

There is a third subject about which I must acknowledge that I differ from my distinguished colleague. The subject of spheres of influence is obviously central of the origins of the Cold War. Professor Miscamble largely embraces the thesis for which Marc Tractenberg argued in *A Constructed Peace* – in essence, that at the instance of Secretary of State James F.

¹⁵ I place the term “interference” in quotation marks because while it is commonly employed in this context, it is not really appropriate. Except for Poland and Czechoslovakia, the countries of Eastern Europe were defeated enemies subject to Allied Control Commissions.

¹⁶ Governmental Committee of Defense, Order No. 5594s, 10 April 1944, Document No. 4 in T. V. Volokitina et al., eds, *Sovyetski0 Faktor v Vostochno0 Yevrope, 1944-1948*, 53-56.

¹⁷ Perry Biddiscombe, “Prodding the Russian Bear: Pro-German Resistance in Romania, 1944-45,” *European History Quarterly*, 23 (1993), 193-232.

¹⁸ David Alvarez and I treat this matter at some length in a study of intelligence in the early Cold War now nearing completion with the working title of *“Through a Glass, Darkly”: American Intelligence and the Soviet Union at the Dawn of the Cold War*.

Byrnes the United States wrote off Eastern Europe at the Potsdam Conference.¹⁹ Now Exhibit A for the argument that an appeasing Byrnes consigned Eastern Europe to outer darkness is the recognition of the Bulgarian and Romanian governments after the Moscow Conference of Foreign Ministers, although both remained unrepresentative. Recognition really represented only a tactical change. From the spring of 1945 Washington had hoped to make the governments of the former German satellites more representative by withholding diplomatic recognition from them. The British argued that this was a futile approach, and the best hope of effecting political change in the satellites would be to conclude as quickly as possible peace treaties that would entail the withdrawal of the Red Army from the satellites. In October 1945 Ambassador W. A. Harriman visited Stalin at Sochi on the Black Sea. During the course of their discussions Stalin convinced Harriman and through him Byrnes and the State Department, that he really did not care whether the United States recognized the interim regimes. Byrnes then changed course and adopted the British view that early peace treaties should be the primary objective. And that decision entailed recognition of the still-unrepresentative governments of Bulgaria and Romania, as otherwise the United States could hardly conclude treaties with them. The diplomatic representatives in those countries, Maynard Barnes and Burton Berry protested, but only until they understood the reason for the change.²⁰

To his credit, Professor Miscamble appears at some level to resist full acceptance of the view that after Potsdam the United States consigned Eastern Europe to a kind of diplomatic *Ultima Thule* in defiance of every value that the government of the United States professed to represent and every identifiable interest it possessed. Toward the end of *From Roosevelt to Truman* Miscamble allows himself, with perhaps more insight than he realizes, the statement that “To a great extent, some variation of a ‘Finlandized’ Eastern Europe is what American policy makers in 1945 and 1946 had hoped might satisfy Stalin . . .” (327-28) The thought here seems to be that Truman and Byrnes hoped that Stalin would define some sort of self-denying ordinance for himself. Actually, however, they went to considerable lengths to help him “Finlandize” Eastern Europe. At the core of Byrnes’s diplomacy was a major initiative that finds no mention in *From Roosevelt to Truman*: a treaty of demilitarization for Germany, which Byrnes presented to Stalin at the Moscow Council of Foreign Ministers and for which he continued to press throughout the negotiations of the

¹⁹ It is of course well established that Byrnes offered a division of Germany with respect to reparations and even, somewhat less certainly, administration. But the issue here is everything else east of Germany. The argument that this was all written off is, to resort to Wolfgang Pauli’s famous formulation, “not even wrong.” It is entirely appropriate, therefore, that the evidence advanced for it has a certain fanciful quality. Following Charles L. Mee’s *Meeting at Potsdam* (always a bad idea) Professor Miscamble adduces the minutes of a discussion at Potsdam (212-13) that purportedly reveal a naked division of Europe – mine, yours. The subject of the discussion, however, is how the victors should draw *reparations from German assets*. There is not a hint of a division of political influence.” Thompson Minutes,” *Foreign Relations of the United States: Conference of Berlin*, 2 (Washington: Department of State, 1960), 566-69.

²⁰ I dealt with these matters years ago in an article: “American Policy toward Eastern Europe and the Origins of the Cold War, 1941-1946: An Alternative Interpretation,” *The Journal of American History*, 68 (September 1981), 313-336. I return to them in “*A Glooming Peace*.”

10 September 2007

peace treaties for Germany's former satellites. This initiative had had two purposes: to induce the Soviets to relent in Eastern Europe by removing their fears of a revanchist Germany -- or else to force them to show by rejection of the instrument that "security" was only a pretext for prolonging the occupation of Eastern Europe.²¹ But if their concerns were sincere, Byrnes offered them a blueprint for a "Finlandized" Eastern Europe. The states of the region could not threaten the USSR without German support, the very possibility of which the proffered treaty of demilitarization would obviate. Byrnes, moreover, took the initiative in the negotiation of treaties of peace with the former satellites that effectively disarmed them while banning fascist organizations and implicitly recognizing a Soviet right of intervention against a resurgence of forces truly "unfriendly" to Russia. This, in fact, was a model for "Finlandization that went someone further than the actual "Finlandization" we know from a later period.²² But it was also a dispensation under the former satellites would have remained free in their domestic affairs and hence not ready instruments of aggression for the Soviets.

Professor Miscamble is correct to stress the effect upon the Truman Administration of the Turkish crisis, which more than any other single event of the year of the Cold War convinced American officials that Soviet policy was at least potentially aggressive in dangerous ways. But the other half of the process of reconsidering the Soviets' challenge was their seeming indifference to the deal that Byrnes had offered them. Their bluff, as Truman said, had been called.²³

The proposition that the United States abandoned Eastern Europe even before the Cold War had begun distorts American diplomacy, rendering incomprehensible not only the constant encouragement of the opposition parties of the region but also equally telling if less familiar initiatives such as radio propaganda to unsettle the communist-dominated interim regime, the leaking to the press of diplomatic reports and intelligence damaging to the Soviet position, and various actions of the secret services such as the extensive contacts in 1946 between the Central Intelligence Group and the partisan formations of the Romanian opposition.²⁴ The thesis also obscures much of the reason for Washington's reconsideration of Soviet motives in 1946 and, worse, one of the principal reasons why the United States cared about European developments in the first place. A Europe divided in the way that it seemed likely to be at the end of the war was potentially threatening to the

²¹ Diplomats were open about these purposes when speaking to the press.: *New York Times*, April 30, 1946, 1.

²² See note 21.

²³ Diary of Joseph E. Davies, September 30, 1946, Library of Congress, Papers of Joseph E. Davies.

²⁴ Readers familiar with postwar Romanian history will recognize the reference to the so-called "Hall-Hamilton Affair." David Alvarez and I will give the first full account in our book on postwar intelligence. Interestingly, the Romanian who survived this tragic episode told me that they had been shown a letter from Truman saying that Major Thomas Hall and Lieutenant Ira C. Hamilton represented him. Hamilton, whom I knew well, would say only that he took his orders from General Vandenberg of the CIG.

10 September 2007

United States. While Roosevelt anticipated an Anglo-Soviet condominium over Europe, he and other policymakers, as we have seen, feared the consequences of unbridled Anglo-Soviet rivalry, for therein, seemingly, lay the only obvious cause of a new war. The danger of an Anglo-Soviet war for the United States was that the British would surely lose it, leaving the Soviets masters of Europe. This was precisely why in 1946 the JCS urged resistance to the Soviet demands on Turkey. The issue, as the Chiefs saw matters, was not Turkey but the Anglo-Soviet war likely to result from Soviet intrusion into the Mediterranean, a conflict that would leave the Soviets in control of Europe and the United States without a militarily significant ally in Eurasia.²⁵ But a “Finlandized” Eastern Europe might buffer the Anglo-Soviet conflict, sparing the United States the nightmare of a consolidated Eurasia. A closely related fear was that Anglo-Soviet conflict might allow Germany to rise from defeat by playing the victors off against each other. These ideas were the received wisdom of the day, being featured in influential works like William T. R. Fox’s *The Super-Powers* and a remarkable manifesto prepared for the Joint Staff by virtually all the leading figures in the infant discipline of international relations.²⁶ The concern with the dangers of Anglo-Soviet rivalry presciently predicted the Cold War, save in one respect: there was little appreciation of just how weak Britain would be after the war and even less that it would be the fate of the United States to replace Britain as guarantor of the European balance of power, with the dangers that entailed.

There were many reasons why America stepped in the breach in Britain’s stead. But, as Melvyn Leffler has shown, none was so compelling as the prospect of a Europe united against the United States, a dispensation that would have united Germany’s science with Russia’s manpower and pivotal geopolitical position. That would have been the “empire of the world” about which Mackinder warned at the beginning of the twentieth century. As Roosevelt put it in a radio address of 1941,

For if the world outside the Americas fall under Axis domination, the shipbuilding facilities which the Axis powers would then possess in all of Europe, in the British Isles and in Far East would be much greater than all the shipbuilding facilities and potentialities of all the Americas – not only greater but two or three times greater – enough to win. Even if the United States threw all its resources into such a situation seeking to double or even redouble the size of our Navy, the Axis

²⁵ “The War Scare of 1946 and Its Consequences,” *Diplomatic History*, 21, 3 (Summer 1997), 392-3.

²⁶ William T. R. Fox, *The Super-Powers: The United States, Britain, and the Soviet Union: Their Responsibility for Peace* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1944), 96-97, 103, 112, 116; Memorandum for Information No. 382, Joint Secretariat to distribution, 29 March 1945, subj: “A Security Policy for Post-War America,” NARA, RH 218, JCS Decimal File 1942-1945, CCS 092 (7-27-44). The authors of the paper last cited were Frederick S. Dunn, Arnold Wolfers, William T. R. Fox and Davie N. Rowe of Yale University, Edward M. Earle and Harold Sprout of Princeton University.

10 September 2007

powers, in control of the rest of the world, would have the man power and the physical resources to outbuild several times over.²⁷

This danger did not disappear with the defeat of the Axis. Far from it. Historians have often observed that the United States emerged from the Second World War the most powerful nation of the world. This is a reasonably accurate description of the *existing* situation in 1945. Yet the *potential* dangers confronting the country were also considerable, although they are much less familiar. After World War II the Soviet Union stood closer to attaining “the empire of the world” than any nation before it. The ironic outcome of the United States’ victory in that struggle was that its strategic position was in fundamental ways *potentially* weaker than it had been in 1940, its wealth and technological supremacy notwithstanding. A victory of the Axis had threatened the domination of Eurasia by an *alliance* of three dissimilar and potentially rivalrous powers, not a single hegemon. Even if the Axis had triumphed, moreover, immense labors faced its strongest members, Germany and Japan. Hitler had entertained no expectation of conquering the entire Soviet Union. He had rather planned to drive the Russians beyond the Urals where, he thought, a struggle would rage essentially forever. Japan’s great project, the subjugation of China, if possible at all, would have been the work of generations. In 1946 the USSR’s prospects were more propitious than those of the Axis had ever been, and the dangers to the United States correspondingly greater. The relentless progress of the Communists in China threatened the voluntary adherence to the Socialist bloc of the world’s most populous state. Half of Europe the Soviets occupied, and throughout the remainder Communist parties flourished with plausible programs for electoral success. The “empire of the world,” or something very like it, stood but a nearly decided civil war and a few elections away from reality.

The reservations I have outlined about *From Roosevelt to Truman* are not insubstantial. But I hasten to remind readers that the heart of the book is a narrowly framed *mise-en-scène* at the center of which stands a well-intentioned but limited president condemned to deal with the uncertain legacy of his predecessor in the face of enormous difficulties. And as that I recommend the work.

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²⁷ “When you see a Rattlesnake Poised . . .”, 11 September 1941, in Rosenman, ed., *The Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt*, 10, *The Call to Battle Stations*, 388.