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Introduction by Thomas Maddux

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Introduction by Thomas Maddux, California State University Northridge

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George F. Kennan and John Lewis Gaddis need no introduction to H-Diplo members as their contributions to the Cold War and Cold War literature have been voluminously praised and criticized -- from Kennan's contributions to U.S. containment strategy and criticism of U.S. policymakers implementation of it to Gaddis' contributions to the post-revisionist perspective on the origins of the Cold War, U.S. strategies of containment from Harry S. Truman through Ronald Reagan, and *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History*. Kennan's first book in 1951, a collection of lectures under the title *American Foreign Policy: 1900-1950*, described by Gaddis as "hastily composed, passionately written, brilliantly if not deliberately timed," (435) put Kennan "within a 'realist' theoretical tradition that dated back to Thucydides—whom Kennan had not yet even read" (437). With the publication of *Russia and the West under Lenin and Stalin* in 1961 and *Memoirs: 1925-1950* in 1967, Kennan's influence spread to a new generation of scholars such as Gaddis who were looking for an alternative interpretive perspective on the Cold War to both traditionalists who defended the global containment of a monolithic, ideologically driven communism and to New Left revisionists who offered a mirror image of the U.S. driven by capitalism and Wilsonian exceptionalism to dominate at the expense of Soviet insecurity.

As one of several post-revisionists writing in the early 1970s, Gaddis downplayed the role of ideology in shaping U.S. and Soviet policy as well as the quest to determine "guilt" for starting the Cold War.<sup>1</sup> Gaddis and other scholars gave more emphasis to the domestic political context shaping U.S. policy, the role of misperception and miscalculation on both sides of the conflict, and the degree to which the results of World War II produced an inescapable conflict. The views that Gaddis expressed coincided with Kennan's contemporary and retrospective assessments, although differences existed on issues such as the unification of Germany and NATO. Kennan and Gaddis began their cooperation on the biography in 1981 with an agreement that Gaddis would have unrestricted access to Kennan's records, and publication would only take place after Kennan's lifetime, which probably arrived much later than either had anticipated -- in 2005 when Kennan had reached the age of one hundred and one.

All of the reviewers have engaged previously with the Cold War, with Kennan directly or indirectly, with Gaddis' assessments on the Cold War from its origins to its conclusion, and all have faced the challenge that Kennan and Gaddis had to deal with in their long collaboration on the biography of adjusting their views as they gained more perspective on the course of the Cold War, as more primary sources became available especially on the Soviet side, and as new generations of historians brought fresh perspectives to the conflict.

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<sup>1</sup> See John Lewis Gaddis, *The United States and the Origins of the Cold War, 1941-1947* (New York, 1972); George Herring, *Aid to Russia, 1941-1946: Strategy, Diplomacy, the Origins of the Cold War* (New York, 1973); and Daniel Yergin, *Shattered Peace: The Origins of the Cold War and the National Security State* (Boston, 1977). See also Gaddis, "The Emerging Post-Revisionist Synthesis on the Origins of the Cold War," *Diplomatic History* 7:3 (Summer 1983): 171-190. DOI: 10.1111/j.1467-7709.1983.tb00389.x <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-7709.1983.tb00389.x>

All of the reviewers find aspects of Gaddis' study to praise such as Walter Hixson who notes Gaddis' "exhaustive research" and "trenchant and provocative analysis," and Frank Costigliola who considers *George F. Kennan* a "monumental and absorbing book" with "elegant and lively" prose. For David Engerman, the richness of the Kennan diaries and letters enabled Gaddis to provide a "good account of Kennan's perspective on his own life" as Gaddis acts "as much as amanuensis as he does as a biographer." In praising Gaddis' accomplishment as a biographer along with his past success as a diplomatic historian, Wilson Miscamble emphasizes Gaddis' empathy toward Kennan for "even when questioning Kennan's decisions or criticizing his views, he treats him with enormous respect. He resists any temptation to use Kennan's life to serve either some cause or idea of his own. He doesn't impose himself on Kennan but insightfully reveals his subject's complexities." As with other reviewers, Hope Harrison commends Gaddis' "wonderful job of de-constructing the long telegram and X-article and other later policy papers and public views expressed by Kennan." Robert Jervis recommends that "every serious student of the period should read the book and I cannot imagine anyone coming away without ideas, insights, and new thinking. The book is engrossing and stimulating."

Since Kennan's career extended from his entrance into Princeton in 1921 to his last publications in the 1990s, Gaddis had to make choices on coverage and emphasis even within 700 pages of text. Some of the reviewers would have preferred different selections. Harrison, for example, wanted to "know more about Kennan's initial views on Russia" and the Soviet regime, and asks a series of questions including the possible impact on Kennan's views of his education at Princeton and the University of Berlin as well as his training as a Russian specialist at State Department outposts in Tallin in Estonia and Riga in Latvia. As Harrison points out, Kennan in 1931 expressed a very critical view of the U.S.S.R before he arrived in Moscow in December 1933 with the first U.S. Ambassador to the Soviet Union, William Bullitt. With the opening of the Kennan papers at Princeton, readers may anticipate a forthcoming article or dissertation on Harrison's suggested topic. Hixson and Costigliola question Gaddis' devoting only two hundred pages to Kennan's post-governmental career and suggest that this reveals, as Hixson asserts, "Gaddis's own prejudices" with respect to Kennan's foreign policy views. As Costigliola affirms, Gaddis "remained largely unsympathetic to Kennan's efforts in the subsequent forty years to propose a changed relationships with the Soviets that would lead through negotiations to an easing of the Cold War," and Costigliola senses Kennan's concerns about Gaddis's views in his letters and diaries. To support his assertion that "Gaddis's political predilections" shaped the biography, Costigliola refers to Gaddis' handling of the debate between Kennan and former secretary of state Dean Acheson over Kennan's call for a U.S. disengagement from the Cold War in Europe as well as Kennan's contribution in "making opposition to the Vietnam War respectable" and his continuing public criticism of U.S. policy in Vietnam and endorsement of Eugene McCarthy against Lyndon Johnson in the 1968 campaign. Miscamble, on the other hand, considers Gaddis's evaluation of the Kennan-Acheson debate an illustration of the "high quality" of the biography. "For the most part Gaddis takes no easy cheap shots at Acheson in order to elevate Kennan," Miscamble concludes, for "his discussion of their differing approaches provides insight regarding both men."

A reader looking for an updated Gaddis assessment on Soviet policy or on the wisdom and impact of the policies that Kennan proposed and were followed to some degree will be disappointed. As Jervis notes, “Gaddis is trying to explain how Kennan saw the world and behaved; whether he was right or wrong is not his primary concern.” In his review Jervis explores in depth the “pillars” of the way Kennan thought including style, emotion and psychology, the importance of history, and religious faith. Jervis applies these concepts to both Kennan’s policy contributions such as the “Long Telegram” and the “X-Article” and to his dissent from U.S. policy on building the H-bomb and excessive militarization of U.S. policy, his disengagement proposals for Central Europe and Germany, and his frequent dissent from American presidents. Jervis also explores Gaddis’ assessments of Kennan’s political shifts as well as “three guiding principles on which Kennan was consistent—and probably correct” including the importance of restoring Europe’s independence from both Moscow and Washington, the belief that military threats should be subordinated to diplomacy, and the importance of “contingency and the need for flexibility.”

Gaddis describes Kennan’s international reputation as a “diplomat, grand strategist, historian, memoirist, cultural critic, and antiwar activist” (ix), and the reviewers offer interesting and differing perspectives on what they prefer to emphasize about Kennan. For Engerman, Kennan was an intellectual policy maker who became a historian and critic of U.S. Cold War policies. To Hixson Kennan is “best understood as an alienated foreign policy intellectual and social critic ... one [who] offers a great deal of insight into the flaws and contradictions of American diplomacy.” Costigliola prefers Kennan’s own self-description as “a prophet. It was for this that I was born,” and suggests that Gaddis’ portrait of Kennan is “ultimately clipped and flattened” for the “the personality revealed in Kennan’s diaries and letters—even the figure who emerges from the transcripts of Gaddis’s interviews—was more irreverent as a collegian, more deeply identified with Russian culture as a fledgling diplomat, more ambivalent about his marriage, more alienated from American life, more included to concealment, and more tortured by the limitations of old age.” Miscamble, however, supports Gaddis’s emphasis on Kennan’s own self-evaluation of his different roles as a teacher: “on understanding Russia; on shaping a strategy for dealing with the country; on the danger that in pursuing that strategy too aggressively, the United States could endanger itself; on what the past suggested about societies that had done just this; on how to study history; on how to write; on how to live” (697).

In his response to the reviews, Gaddis provides further insights on his relationship with Kennan, the nature of the Kennan records, and insights on writing a biography of a major public figure.

### **Participants:**

**John Lewis Gaddis** is Robert A. Lovett Professor of History and Director of the Brady-Johnson Program in Grand Strategy at Yale University, where he teaches courses on Cold War history, grand strategy, biography, and historical methods. Educated at the University of Texas in Austin, he has also taught at Ohio University, the United States Naval War College, the University of Helsinki, Princeton University, and Oxford University. His most recent books are *The Landscape of History: How Historians Map the Past* (2002); *Surprise,*

*Security, and the American Experience* (2004); *The Cold War: A New History* (2005); a new edition of *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of Postwar American National Security Policy* (2005); and *George F. Kennan: An American Life* (2011), winner of the New York Historical Society Prize for best book in American history, the National Book Critics Circle award for best biography, and the Robert H. Ferrell Prize of the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations.

**Frank Costigliola** received his Ph.D. from Cornell University and is Professor of History at the University of Connecticut. He is the author, most recently, of *Roosevelt's Lost Alliances: How Personal Politics Helped Start the Cold War* (Princeton, 2012). He has received fellowships from the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton, the Guggenheim Foundation, the NEH, and the Norwegian Nobel Institute. He is a former president of the Society for the History of American Foreign Relations.

**David C. Engerman** is Professor of History at Brandeis University, where he has taught since receiving his Ph.D. from the University of California-Berkeley in 1998. He is the author of two books on American ideas about Russia: *Modernization from the Other Shore* (Harvard University Press, 2003) and *Know Your Enemy* (Oxford University Press, 2009; paperback, 2011). He also wrote and edited two collections on modernization and development. His current project explores American and Soviet aid to India in the 1950s and 1960s.

**Hope M. Harrison** is Associate Professor of History and International Affairs at George Washington University. She earned her B.A. from Harvard and her Ph.D. from Columbia. She is the author of *Driving the Soviets Up the Wall: Soviet-East German Relations, 1953-1961* (Princeton University Press, 2003), and she is currently working on a book examining the German historical memory of the Berlin Wall and debates about commemorating the Berlin Wall since 1989.

**Walter L. Hixson**, distinguished professor, University of Akron, is the author of *The Myth of American Diplomacy: National Identity and U.S. Foreign Policy* (2008), among other works.

**Robert Jervis** is Adlai E. Stevenson Professor of International Politics at Columbia University. His most recent book is *Why Intelligence Fails: Lessons from the Iranian Revolution and the Iraq War* (Cornell University Press, 2010). He was President of the American Political Science Association in 2000-01 and has received career achievement awards from the International Society of Political Psychology and ISA's Security Studies Section. In 2006 he received the National Academy of Science's tri-annual award for behavioral sciences contributions to avoiding nuclear war.

**Wilson D. (Bill) Miscamble, C.S.C.**, is professor of history at the University of Notre Dame. He authored *George F. Kennan and the Making of American Foreign Policy, 1947-1950* in 1992. More recently he published *From Roosevelt to Truman: Potsdam, Hiroshima and the Cold War* (2007) and *The Most Controversial Decision: Truman, the Atomic Bombs, and the Defeat of Japan* (2011).

Review by Frank Costigliola, University of Connecticut

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(This review first appeared in the *New York Review of Books*, 8 December 2011. It is reprinted with the permission of the publisher).

It seemed like the perfect match. John Lewis Gaddis was smart, sympathetic, and eager to write the biography. George F. Kennan admired Gaddis as probably “the best of the younger historians of American policy in the immediate postwar period.”<sup>1</sup> Kennan had earned enormous respect over his long career as a diplomat, historian, public intellectual, and critic of U.S. policy in the Cold War. Yet he remained thin-skinned about any disparagement. Anxious to have his voice heard by future generations, Kennan worried that “weak and superficial” – and wrong-headed – biographies would garble his message and life’s story.<sup>2</sup> The intellectual turmoil of the 1960s-70s amplified that concern. Some younger historians, spurred by their abhorrence of the Vietnam War and by the analyses of William A. Williams and others on the “New Left,” were critiquing the entire postwar foreign policy establishment, Kennan included, even though he had spoken out eloquently against the conflict in Southeast Asia. Kennan’s *American Diplomacy*, which had won widespread praise after its publication in 1951, was now being dismissed as “obscurantist and misleading,” a reviewer in these pages reported in August 1968.<sup>3</sup>

Gaddis, in contrast, praised the wisdom and necessity of Kennan’s famous containment doctrine. Kennan had articulated these ideas in his long telegram of 1946 and “Mr. X” article of 1947 and while director of the State Department’s policy planning staff from 1947-49. The historian’s widely read *Strategies of Containment* paid homage to Kennan as the brilliant “grand strategist” of the late 1940s who had astutely assessed problems and had recommended the right mix of policies to deal with them. In 1977, *Foreign Affairs*, which had published the original “Mr. X” article, followed up with a retrospective, written by Gaddis, lauding Kennan’s foresight, consistency, and caution regarding the use of U.S. military force. When two younger historians, citing recently declassified documents, charged that the containment doctrine was dangerously vague, and that Kennan in 1948-49 had in fact recommended military intervention to deal with political crises in Italy and on Taiwan, Gaddis sprang to the defense. He publicly mocked the critics for puffing up such “curiosities.”<sup>4</sup> Kennan appreciated the counterstroke. He confided to Gaddis that he was “appalled at the inability of many of our scholars to look carefully at the wording of official documents and to put them into the [proper] context.” While “I have no desire to enter in a

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<sup>1</sup> George F. Kennan to Michael J. Lacey, 11 October 1977, box 15, George F. Kennan papers, Mudd Library, Princeton University, Princeton, NJ.

<sup>2</sup> Kennan to Gaddis, 3 April 1984, box 15, Kennan papers.

<sup>3</sup> C. Vann Woodward, “Wild in the Stacks,” *The New York Review of Books*, XL:2 (1 August 1968): 10.

<sup>4</sup> Gaddis, “Kennan and Containment: A Reply,” *SHAFR Newsletter* (1978), copy in box 15, Kennan papers. The historians were John W. Coogan and Michael H. Hunt.

polemic with [those] whose opinion I do not greatly value, I do, however, value your own opinion.”<sup>5</sup>

In the fall of 1981, Gaddis put to Kennan, who would soon turn 78, the possibility of his writing an authorized biography to be published posthumously. He asked for exclusive access to the Kennan diaries, letters, and other papers still closed to other scholars, and he wanted to be able to talk to Kennan about the past. Kennan accepted eagerly: “I can think of no one who . . . would be better qualified than yourself.” He added, “I value your contribution especially, because so much nonsense has been talked about ‘containment.’”<sup>6</sup>

There soon surfaced, however, hints of a disagreement that would cause the older man some anguish. Though Gaddis lauded Kennan’s “grand strategy” between 1946 and 1948 to contain the Soviet Union, he remained largely unsympathetic to Kennan’s efforts in the subsequent forty years to propose a changed relationship with the Soviets that would lead through negotiations to an easing of the Cold War. Kennan tried to explain it to Gaddis repeatedly. He had always regarded “successful containment not as an end in itself but as the prerequisite for the ultimate process of negotiation.” Since 1948, he had viewed the division of Europe into Soviet and American spheres as a dangerous “geopolitical anomaly.” The creation of NATO and the Warsaw Pact, the armies eyeballing each other across the West German-East German frontier, and the deadly weapons on hair-trigger alert – all this disturbed Kennan who increasingly feared nuclear war.

He lamented his failure, particularly between 1948 and 1958, to convince Washington and its allies in Western Europe to trade their “positions of strength” for a Soviet pullback from Eastern Europe, nuclear reductions, and a re-knitting of divided Germany and Europe.<sup>7</sup> Kennan never claimed that such negotiations would succeed. Rather he insisted, and in numerous articles and speeches pleaded, that the horrors of nuclear war made it foolhardy not to try. Gaddis, who regarded the Cold War as a secure “long peace” and who edged to a more conventional hard-line view from the 1970s on, shared neither Kennan’s concerns nor analysis. Though their relations remained cordial, Kennan’s letters and diaries show that the aging man was bothered by their differences. It would have been understandable if this disagreement caused some delay in Gaddis’s completion of his master work.

By 2000, Kennan, now 96-years old, despaired that Gaddis “had no idea of what was really at stake” in the “long battle I was waging . . . against the almost total militarization of Western policy towards Russia.” Looking back at the nuclear holocaust narrowly averted during the Cuban missile and Berlin crises and at the costly proxy wars waged in Vietnam and elsewhere, he believed that “had my efforts been successful,” they “could have obviated

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<sup>5</sup> Kennan to Gaddis, 6 April 1978, box 15, Kennan papers.

<sup>6</sup> Kennan to Gaddis, 1 December 1981, box 15, Kennan papers.

<sup>7</sup> See, for instance, Kennan to Gaddis, 4 September 1980; 28 September 1986, box 15, Kennan papers.

the vast expenses, dangers, and distortions of outlook of the ensuing Cold War.” Then, perhaps thinking of the time and faith invested in his chronicler, Kennan lamented:

That this battle should not be apparent even to the most serious of my postmortem biographers means that the most significant of the efforts of the first half of my career – namely, to bring about a reasonable settlement of the European problems of the immediate postwar period – will never find their historian or their understanding. And this is hard.<sup>8</sup>

Kennan, then approaching the end of his 101-year life, judged “the most significant effort” of his career not his helping formulate the policies to contain the Soviet Union, but rather his subsequent push for Washington to establish workable relations with Moscow.

Despite its problems of perspective and balance, Gaddis’s *George F. Kennan* remains a monumental and absorbing book. The prose is elegant and lively. Though Kennan will likely attract other biographers, none will be able to match the research displayed here. Not only has Gaddis pored through the 20,000-page diary, a separate “dream diary,” and the 300-plus boxes of other papers by Kennan now open for research at Princeton, but he also conducted multiple interviews with the former diplomat and his associates. Most of those people are now gone. The author had privileged access to family papers still in the possession of Kennan’s daughter. The cordial correspondence and discussions between “George” and “John” fill three manuscript boxes. Gaddis did extensive work in other U.S. archives. There are some British and even a few Russian documents. He is often perceptive, sensitive, and reflective. And he is justifiably proud that George and his wife, Annelise, became for two decades “my companions” (xiii).

Gaddis’s political predilections – as evidenced by his enthusiasm for Kennan as Cold Warrior in 1946-48 and his skepticism about Kennan as peacemaker in later years – shape this biography. He sides largely with Kennan’s critics, such as former secretary of state Dean Acheson, in the heated debate over Kennan’s push in 1957-58 for U.S. “disengagement” from the cold war in Europe. Indeed, while quoting extensively from Acheson’s venomous assault in *Foreign Affairs*, Gaddis merely notes Kennan’s rebuttal in the same journal.

In 1966-68, Kennan articulated a set of cogent and prescient ideas and policies in response to the Vietnam War and other changes around the world. The former cold warrior had an important part in making opposition to the Vietnam War respectable. The biography, however, devotes only one paragraph to recounting the substance of Kennan’s testimony in February 1966 before Senator J. William Fulbright’s Foreign Relations Committee. Kennan’s strong testimony January 1967 on the futility of the war, at a time when it had become a bitter national issue, goes unmentioned. Nor, curiously, does the book even mention Kennan’s early and influential endorsement of Senator Eugene McCarthy in the

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<sup>8</sup> Kennan diary, 2 May 2000, box 239, Kennan papers.



1968 Democratic presidential primaries on the grounds of McCarthy's opposition to the war.

The biography suffers from this neglect. In the heated cross-fire of the hearings, Kennan outlined long-range principles grounded in history. He laid out a strategy that if not grand was certainly wise: scrutinizing old ideas and knee-jerk attitudes, insisting that the nation's goals match resources, and guarding against both over-involvement and timidity. He argued that much of China's fierce rhetoric stemmed from that nation's past humiliation by the West. "A new generation of Chinese leaders" would likely improve relations, he believed. He was also prescient in warning, a year before the Soviets crushed the Prague Spring, that such an uprising would induce the Soviets to march, "just as the Tsar's government would have moved in."<sup>9</sup>

As in the 1950s, Kennan worried about the military stand-off along the border of the two Germanies. For him, serious danger lay not in far-off Vietnam but rather in the nuclear arms race. Washington's primary challenge was in "the real possibilities for a genuine . . . exciting and constructive . . . understanding eventually between the Russian people and our people." This lifelong lover of Russian culture remarked, "If I did not believe this was a possibility I wouldn't have led the life I have for the last 40 years."<sup>10</sup>

Regarding Vietnam, where escalation was yielding only stalemate, Kennan urged securing enclaves in the south, halting military offensives and bombing, and inviting negotiations. He wanted a U.S. withdrawal but not a precipitous and humiliating exit. As millions watched on television, Kennan argued before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that Americans should neither forget that "we are a great nation" able to endure the loss of South Vietnam nor delude ourselves with "illusions about invincibility." Americans were vulnerable to manipulation. "Practically everybody who wants our aid in the world claims that he wants it in the cause of freedom." No matter the military arguments, "the spectacle of Americans" attacking "a poor and helpless people, and particularly a people of different race and color," wreaked "psychological damage" to America's global image. He stressed "that there is more respect to be won . . . by a resolute and courageous liquidation of unsound positions than by the most stubborn pursuit of extravagant or unpromising objectives."<sup>11</sup>

Citing Woodrow Wilson's futile promotion of elections in Russia in 1918-19, Kennan argued that such empty sacraments could not stabilize South Vietnam. In general, "it is very, very difficult for outsiders to come into a situation" – any foreign situation – "and to

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<sup>9</sup> Hearings before the Committee on Foreign Relations United States Senate, 89<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> session, on S. 2793, 10 February 1966 [hereafter 1966 Senate Hearings], p. 371; Hearings before the Committee on Foreign Relations United States Senate, 90<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> session, 30 January 1967 [hereafter 1967 Senate Hearings], p. 46.

<sup>10</sup> 1967 Senate Hearings, p. 10.

<sup>11</sup> 1966 Senate Hearings, pp. 338, 384, 334-35.

do good.” Moreover, “by our interference” in peripheral matters, “we raise questions of prestige which need not have been raised.” Far better to “bring our influence to bear . . . through the power of the example of our own civilization here at home.” He summed up his testimony by quoting John Quincy Adams’s famous speech of July 4, 1821. “While America stood as ‘the well-wisher to the freedom and independence of all,’ she should be ‘the champion and vindicator only of her own.’”<sup>12</sup>

This carefully argued position does not get adequate attention in Gaddis’s account. Nor, as has been said, does he recount how on February 29, 1968 – between the beginning of the Tet offensive on January 31 and the New Hampshire primary on March 12 – Kennan, the originator of the containment doctrine supposedly justifying the Vietnam War, addressed a crowd in Newark, New Jersey. He attacked the war as a “grievously unsound” venture that had invested huge resources in “a single secondary theater of world events.” Escalation threatened nuclear conflict with China or Russia. The gravity of the situation approached “the first months of 1942.” The war was alienating America’s youth and much of the world. Kennan scorned the Johnson administration for forgetting that a country such as ours owed “a decent respect to the opinions of mankind.” His talk amounted to a devastating critique of the administration’s “grand strategy.”

Kennan finished with a strong endorsement of Eugene McCarthy, who deserved “our admiration, our sympathy, and our support.”<sup>13</sup> At first McCarthy’s campaign had seemed a quixotic venture, notable only for the enthusiasm of its young supporters. That Kennan came out for McCarthy – whose surprisingly high vote in the New Hampshire primary helped persuade Johnson not to run – was a remarkable moment in American political history and it is hard to understand why Gaddis ignores it.

From the 1960s to the 1980s, with the nuclear arms race seemingly unstoppable, Kennan grew almost frantic about an imminent holocaust. “The only thing I have left in life,” he told Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., “is to do everything I can to stop the war” (556). Appalled at President Ronald Reagan’s ramped up arms spending and rhetoric about the “evil empire,” Kennan denounced the administration as “ignorant, unintelligent, complacent and arrogant; worse still is the fact that it is frivolous and reckless” (656). Even after Reagan reversed course and began serious arms reduction negotiations with Mikhail Gorbachev, the ex-diplomat remained skeptical about the President. Gaddis, for his part, admires Reagan as being, “like Franklin D. Roosevelt . . . an instinctive grand strategist and finds that Kennan’s “attitude bordered on the outrageous” (670).

In 1981, when he made his agreement with Gaddis, Kennan wrote that while he thought Gaddis the most qualified historian “so far as the political-intellectual part of the biography is concerned,” he was unsure about Gaddis’s understanding of his personal life. Gaddis

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., pp. 414, 381, 418, 336.

<sup>13</sup> Kennan, “Introducing Eugene McCarthy,” *The New York Review of Books*, 11 April 1968, <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/1968/apr/11/introducing-eugene-mccarthy/>

responded, rightly, that the personal sphere could not be separated from the political one.<sup>14</sup> That Kennan struggled to control his emotions was obvious not only to his biographer but also to other close observers. The Russian expert Charles E. “Chip” Bohlen, who had known Kennan since the early 1930s, remarked that his friend could not “always divorce his visceral feelings from his knowledge of facts” (119). Another colleague saw him as emotionally fragile: “It was difficult for him to take unpleasant things” (213). Isaiah Berlin, who was him in Moscow in 1945, recalled that Kennan “was terribly absorbed – personally involved, somehow – in the terrible nature of the [Stalin] regime” (212).

Kennan himself “stressed the importance of the psychological dimension” in his life.<sup>15</sup> He told Gaddis that “the inner emotional life of any person, as Freud discovered, is a dreadful chaos. We all have vestiges of our animalistic existence in us.” Consequently, “good form,” whether it involved the ceremonies of diplomacy or the constraints of marriage, “is really the thing to live for.” He continued, “‘Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor’s wife.’ My God, I’ve coveted ten thousand of them in the course of my life, and will continue to do so into the eighties.” “All that has to be fought with. But the main thing is to try to play your role in a decent way.”<sup>16</sup>

Gaddis deals with the political implications of Kennan’s personal character in a bifurcated way. By characterizing Kennan as the cool Clausewitzian in 1946-47, he plays down the sense of frustration that Kennan experienced in Russia – an emotional state that helped fuel the diplomat’s push for containment and the emotional language that made the long telegram and the “Mr. X” article so eloquent and persuasive. Quite different is the way that Gaddis emphasizes the emotional concerns with war that supposedly marred Kennan’s strategic thinking in the mid-1950s, when he sought negotiations to head off a nuclear confrontation in Europe, and again in the 1970s-80s, when he sounded the alarm against the feverish nuclear arms race.

Though he captures much of the man’s complexity, Gaddis’s depiction of Kennan is ultimately clipped and flattened. Perhaps the problem is trying to frame within “an American life,” as the subtitle has it, the biography of someone who mused that even his friends did “not know the depth of my estrangement, the depth of my repudiation of the things [the American public] lives by.”<sup>17</sup> As compared to the portrait in the biography, the personality revealed in Kennan’s diaries and letters – even the figure who emerges from the transcripts of Gaddis’s interviews – was more irreverent as a collegian, more deeply identified with Russian culture as a fledgling diplomat, more ambivalent about his

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<sup>14</sup> Kennan to Gaddis, 1 December 1981; Gaddis to Kennan, 14 December 1981, box 15, Kennan papers.

<sup>15</sup> J. Richardson Dilworth, interview with Gaddis, 6 December 1987, box 15, Kennan papers.

<sup>16</sup> Kennan, interview with Gaddis, 25 August 1982.

<sup>17</sup> Kennan diary, 21 October 1955, box 233, Kennan papers.

marriage, more alienated from American life, more inclined to concealment, and more tortured by the limitations of old age. The Kennan of the letters and diaries is far less conventional and more complex and elusive than the person we encounter in Gaddis's biography.

In his conclusion, Gaddis characterizes Kennan as a teacher, a word that Kennan himself used and that is certainly apt. But Kennan also said that he was "a prophet. It was for this that I was born" (654). Gaddis makes little of this self-description. Prophets are more intense and given to jeremiads than academic teachers. Kennan, perhaps worrying about Gaddis's suitability for depicting the personal side, remarked to him: "People who are a little unusual – the Boheme – they understand me, better than do the regular ones."<sup>18</sup>

Distinctly non-Bohemian, it seems fair to say, were Gaddis and Annelise Sorensen Kennan, to whom the biography is dedicated. The author acknowledges that "Annelise had her way with this book." She urged him to write about the personal as well as the professional side of her husband and to include his lighter moments. She stressed, and Kennan himself acknowledged, that he tended to write in the diary when he was feeling morose, and rarely when he was not. Annelise was by all accounts a strong-minded spouse. They were close and their marriage lasted 73 years. Nevertheless, Kennan once "went out of his way to say that she is not a particularly 'intellectual' woman."<sup>19</sup> Nor did she always empathize with her husband's moods and worries. Perhaps as a consequence, he sometimes did not confide in her. When Gaddis asked Annelise what she remembered about the unhappiness with U.S. policy that had spurred Kennan to write the long telegram, Annelise reflected. "I don't know whether I took [the discontent] so entirely seriously . . . I don't think I was aware that he was so frustrated."<sup>20</sup>

Kennan turned to other women for solace and to meet other needs. He had, as Gaddis tells us, a series of affairs, flirtations, and fantasies. He wrote sections of the diary, including some entries about other women, in Russian – at one point reminding himself that he had to perfect the art of hiding from his wife nothing but the big things. Annelise held her husband "down to earth." As Gaddis put it, she pulled him "to the center."<sup>21</sup>

He does the same in this book. Such centering misses some idiosyncrasies that were important to Kennan's thinking. The older man once described to Gaddis his habit, going back to childhood, of picking up on seemingly disassociated sights, sounds, and other stimuli and then integrating them with other elements in his experience to fashion a concept or a connection uniquely his own. Throughout his life he had "read all sorts of

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<sup>18</sup> Kennan, interview with Gaddis, 13 December 1987, box 16, Kennan papers.

<sup>19</sup> J. Richardson Dilworth, interview with Gaddis, 6 December 1987, box 15, Kennan papers.

<sup>20</sup> Annelise Sorensen Kennan, interview with Gaddis, 26 August 1982, box 16, Kennan papers.

<sup>21</sup> J. Richardson Dilworth, interview with Gaddis, 6 December 1987, box 15, Kennan papers.

mystery and beauty and other things into landscapes and places, and also into music.” He sensed what most other people could not. “Every city that I went to had not only a different atmosphere but a different sort of music and intonation to it. . . . I was immensely sensitive and responsive to differences in the atmosphere of places.”

In his seventies, Kennan tried to describe this almost painful acuteness. Visiting Stockholm, “something in the light, the sunlight, the late Northern evening suddenly made me aware of . . . Latvia and Estonia,” not so far away, “and I suddenly was absolutely filled with a sort of nostalgia for . . . the inner beauty and meaning of that flat Baltic landscape and the waters around it. It meant an enormous amount to me.” He then added, “You can’t explain these things.”<sup>22</sup> Gaddis, perhaps understandably, did not try; the conversation does not appear in the biography.

Nonetheless, Kennan’s disclosure helps elucidate a central element of his political thinking: his intuitive yet often incisive and empathic descriptions of the inner worlds of the Russian people and of the Soviet regime – based both on his encyclopedic knowledge about Russia and his imaginative guesswork. To Kennan’s continuing frustration, the isolation of diplomats mandated by Kremlin policy made it impossible to talk intimately with top Soviet officials or most ordinary Russians. Kennan compensated by honing a mode of thought analogous to his sensing and feeling “the inner beauty and meaning” of the Baltic. Gaddis cites a revealing observation of Kennan by the China expert John Paton Davies

It was a delight to watch him probe some sphinxlike announcement in *Pravda* for what might lie within it or behind it, recalling some obscure incident in Bolshevik history or a personality conflict within the Party, quoting a passage from Dostoevsky on Russian character, or citing a parallel in Tsarist foreign policy. His subtle intellect swept the range of possibilities like a radar attuned to the unseen (212).

Kennan was attuned to the seen and the unseen. He integrated cognition and intuition, informing officers at the National War College what the Russian people “wish in their heart of hearts.” He would tell audiences, “I can assure you” about some aspect of Soviet belief about which he could have little evidence.<sup>23</sup> Kennan’s elegant expression and unparalleled expertise gave him such authority that no one questioned that intuition, especially when he was sounding the tocsin about the Soviet menace in 1946-47 while also, to the relief of many, pointing out an escape from the apparent dilemma of appeasement or war.

In the fall of 2002 as the Bush administration was gearing up for war against Iraq, Kennan, then ninety-eight, spoke with reporters for the last time. He was in the Washington home of his old ally, former Senator Eugene McCarthy. Castigating the administration’s policy of

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<sup>22</sup> Kennan, interview with Gaddis, 24 August 1982, box 16, Kennan papers.

<sup>23</sup> See, for instance, Kennan, “The Background of Current Russian Diplomatic Moves,” 10 December 1946 in Giles D. Harlow and George C. Maerz (ed.), *Measures Short of War* (Washington: National Defense University Press, 1991), 86.

preemptive war and its intention to oust Saddam Hussein, he warned that “the history of American diplomacy” demonstrated that “war has a momentum of its own, and it carries you away from all thoughtful intentions.”<sup>24</sup> He appeared sharp and articulate as he sketched out a strategy for the twentieth-first century. Playing down the drama and the wisdom of Kennan’s last public statement, Gaddis mentions this incident in only three terse lines (690). He would have been fairer to his subject if he had taken more account of the view Kennan expressed in these pages in 1999:

This whole tendency to see ourselves as the center of political enlightenment and as teachers to a great part of the world strikes me as unthought-through, vainglorious, and undesirable. If you think that our life here at home has meritorious aspects worthy of emulation by peoples elsewhere, the best way to recommend them is, as John Quincy Adams maintained, not by preaching at others but by the force of example. I could not agree more.

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<sup>24</sup> Albert Eisele, “George Kennan Speaks Out About Iraq,” HNN (George Mason University’s History News Network), 8 August 2005, <http://hnn.us/articles/997.html> (accessed 15 April 2012).

Review by David C. Engerman, Brandeis University

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“The Kennan Industry: John Lewis Gaddis’s Life of Mr. X”

“It isn’t easy being George Kennan,” a neighbor of the diplomat reports, some 600 pages into John Lewis Gaddis’s new biography. Indeed it wasn’t: Kennan was a curmudgeon too old for his times even in high school (where the yearbook listed his pet peeve as “the universe”); before he was 40, he considered himself out of touch with his own time. And perhaps to his own regret, Kennan still had more than 60 years to live; he died in 2005 at the age of 101.

Nor was it easy being George Kennan’s biographer, notes Gaddis, a historian at Yale University. Kennan’s voluminous autobiographical writings are a doubled-edged sword, an extraordinarily rich source but full of conscious efforts to frustrate those hoping to analyze the diplomat’s life and work. Of a poem that Kennan read to friends and family on the occasion of his 40th wedding anniversary, Gaddis complains in *George F. Kennan: An American Life* (Penguin Press) that its 15 stanzas were written “as if to humiliate future biographers” (596).

Yet if it wasn’t easy being Kennan’s biographer, that hardly stopped scholars from trying. A veritable Kennan industry began in the early 1970s and boomed in the late 1980s and early 90s—all while Kennan was not just alive but obstructing research by limiting access to his personal papers stored at Princeton University. Kennan’s interference hardly slowed the flow of work about him. A 1997 bibliography lists almost 180 accounts of Kennan and his writings. Since then scholars have written another 18 dissertations and dozens more articles and books illuminating one or another aspect of Kennan’s long life. And, if the recent spike in the use of Kennan’s private papers at Princeton is any indication, many more are on the way.

All this work for a man whose last official position was as John F. Kennedy’s ambassador to Yugoslavia, and who frequently complained in public (and, we learn from Gaddis’s biography, even more in private) that his ideas were ignored. Kennan considered his contributions to public life of such little influence that when George H.W. Bush awarded him the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1989, he confided to his diary that it was probably “given in recognition not of my success but of my failure” (637).

Medals of Freedom are not awarded to failures, of course, and Kennan’s prize was no exception. President Bush praised his “unique contributions to the national security of the country,” (637) and rightly so. Even as Kennan constantly doubted his own value and importance, he was the architect of “containment,” the strategic doctrine that shaped American foreign relations from the time Kennan coined the phrase in 1946 until the cold war wound down 45 years later.

Kennan's influence rested on two documents he wrote in the late 1940s, just as American policy makers began reckoning with a new world order in which Washington and Moscow—and no longer London, Paris, and Berlin—would be the centers of power. The first of those documents, his so-called Long Telegram, sent from Moscow in 1946, where Kennan was deputy chief of the U.S. mission, had a tremendous effect in spite of the fact that it was classified “secret.” Moscow's 511, as it was known by State Department convention, was the right message at the right time. Just as President Harry S. Truman and those around him were trying to formulate a post-World War II foreign policy amid increasing Soviet intransigence, the Long Telegram diagnosed Soviet policy as driven by age-old Russian characteristics, with Communist ideology a mere “fig leaf of moral and intellectual respectability.” The telegram also offered a prescription: Since Soviet leaders were “impervious to logic of reason” but “highly sensitive to logic of force,” the American task must be to have sufficient force and suggest a “readiness to use it” (203-205) (It speaks volumes about Kennan's ability to shape writings about him that dozens of scholars—myself included—have taken at face value Kennan's description of the Long Telegram as 8,000 words. To Gaddis's credit, he actually counted and found “just over five thousand” words.)

Moscow 511, the State Department's longest-ever dispatch, was probably its most important. It provided an explanation for Soviet belligerence and offered a road map for American strategy—precisely when American policy makers, from President Truman on down, were desperately searching for both. Kennan counseled patience and belief in the American way of life (“the courage and self-confidence to cling to our own methods and conceptions of human society”).<sup>1</sup> That must have come as a particular relief to a haberdasher-turned-party-politician who was hardly known for his cosmopolitanism.

The Long Telegram catapulted the sensitive Kennan from his distant post into the maelstrom of policy making just as Washington began to reckon with the postwar world. His second document, appearing (under the byline “X”) in 1947 in *Foreign Affairs*, the house organ of the American foreign-policy establishment, gave a name to the new policy. “The Sources of Soviet Conflict” called for the “long-term, patient but firm and vigilant containment of Russian expansive tendencies”<sup>2</sup>—and thus was containment born. Kennan would later claim that his conception of containment was strictly nonmilitary, and he soon would disclaim responsibility for the militarized version that followed. Yet as Gaddis showed in his earlier works, and reinforces in his biography, although Kennan's containment may have been a political strategy, it required the possibility of military force. But those debates were for a later day.

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<sup>1</sup> Kennan to Secretary of State, 22 February 1946, State Department Decimal File (U.S. National Archives, Record Group 59), 861.00/2-2246.

<sup>2</sup> X, “The Sources of Soviet Conduct,” *Foreign Affairs* 25:4 (July 1947): 575.



In their own time, Kennan's Long Telegram and *Foreign Affairs* article stood out from the flurry of public pronouncements and classified memoranda for their analytical insight, their answers to policy makers' pressing questions, and the elegance of their prose. America's most prominent commentator on foreign affairs, Walter Lippmann, offered the highest form of respect for Kennan's ideas when he wrote a 14-part response to Kennan's *Foreign Affairs* article, far longer than Kennan's original essay. Lippmann's columns, quickly collected and published in the fall of 1947—30 years almost exactly to the week after the Bolshevik Revolution—gave the brewing new conflict a name; the slender collection was called *The Cold War*. In two statements, then, Kennan defined both the conflict and the American response.

Kennan then spent two busy years as chief of the State Department's in-house think tank, the Policy Planning Staff. While there, he wrote an impressive set of reports on American long-term interests, potential dangers, and policy options around the world that were cosmopolitan and far-reaching—but at the same time (as Gaddis notes) “strikingly solipsistic,” (277) solely reflecting Kennan's advice to his boss, Secretary of State George C. Marshall. The reports were at once impressive and (with one exception) ignored by all but historians. After being eased out of the State Department, Kennan began his half-century affiliation at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, N.J., where he was free to write, lecture, and offer advice to officials without any obligation to teach. That situation was interrupted only twice, for ambassadorial appointments: a stint in Moscow that ended after only four months, when the Soviet Union declared him *persona non grata*, and a decade later, two years in Belgrade.

Kennan's role in shaping the cold war cannot explain scholars' continuing attraction to studying him. Other figures, less often studied, have had a greater impact on American policy. Take, for instance, Kennan's friend Paul Nitze—who disagreed with just about every policy Kennan proposed. Nitze authored NSC-68, calling for the militarization of America's cold-war defense posture, which Kennan came to oppose. Nitze served under all ten presidents from FDR to George H.W. Bush, and was present at most important moments of cold-war policy making. Kennan's moods, meanwhile, moved in a recurring four-year cycle in tune with presidential administrations: Just after each election, he waited in vain to be called upon, whereupon he fell into despair for a political system that had no place for him. Measured by shelf space, though, Nitze can't match Kennan as a biographical subject; there were only two books on Nitze before the appearance two years ago of a biography he shared with another diplomat. And the author of that joint biography, Nitze's grandson Nicholas Thompson, was hardly immune to Kennan's gravitational pull; he devoted the other half of his book, *The Hawk and the Dove* (Henry Holt), to Kennan.

There are three reasons for the size and continued growth of the Kennan industry, all of them amply visible in Gaddis's substantial biography. First, Kennan's own life was filled with paradoxes that attracted attention and sympathy, even—especially?—from scholars who questioned his policies. He was, at best, an intellectual's policy maker. At worst, Kennan was yet another intellectual at sea in the world of politics and power—but this might have endeared him all the more to scholars. Second, Kennan flattered the career choices of historians. Many of the American diplomatic historians who wrote about him

worked in a field that was in direct dialogue with policy makers. In the words of the historian Anders Stephanson, author of *Kennan and the Art of Foreign Policy* (Harvard University Press, 1989), his fellow diplomatic historians “took as a kind of civic duty” to “argue from the point of view of a fictive national-security adviser.”<sup>3</sup> And yet here was a diplomat, one of unquestioned influence, who became a historian. Finally, Kennan’s belief in his own historical importance—a belief that long predated the crucial decade of the 1940s—provides a source base of rare breadth and depth.

Kennan lived a life of ironies and paradoxes, documented exhaustively in Gaddis’s biography. Start with basics of time and place. For a man who came to define American foreign policy for much of the twentieth century, Kennan knew little of his own country and cared for it even less. His denunciations of American life reeked with disappointment and even fear. Kennan, not surprisingly, was well aware of this tendency; as he confided to his sister in 1935, “I hate democracy; I hate the press ...; I hate the ‘peepul;’ I have become clearly un-American” (95). He was no more comfortable in his time than in his country; he was in many respects a man of eighteenth-century sensibilities, railing with increasing frequency against the industrialism, commercialism, and mass culture that he believed were destroying the United States. Such sentiments were on display, for instance, on Kennan’s 1938 visit to his native Milwaukee. He railed, in particular, against the rise of the automobile, linking it to the “sad climax of individualism” and the demise of “the spirit of fellowship” (107 among his countrymen. Not that Kennan sought “fellowship” with many of his compatriots anyway. It is therefore tempting to read Gaddis’s subtitle, *An American Life*, as inadvertent irony.

No sooner had Kennan coined the term “containment” than he disavowed its application at the hands of Nitze (who succeeded him as Policy Planning chief) and others, leaving him as “architect” of a policy that he considered an eyesore. The more that subsequent presidents invoked containment, the more vocally Kennan inveighed against it. His 1966 congressional testimony against deepening American commitments in Vietnam was an early and powerful dissent from Lyndon B. Johnson’s policies. Antiwar liberals loved the testimony, conveniently ignoring Kennan’s reasoning: America should withdraw from Vietnam because the country wasn’t worth the trouble and its inhabitants weren’t suited for democracy. His vocal opposition to nuclear arms in the 1970s and 1980s—when he was joined by liberal groups and Catholic bishops—endeared him to liberals in exact proportion to how much he was alienated from ascendant conservatives. Yet here, too, his reasoning was uniquely Kennanesque, emphasizing human fallibility (he would later title a chapter of a book “Man, the Cracked Vessel”). Kennan was so profoundly conservative in an eighteenth-century, Edmund Burkean way that his policy ideas often squared with twentieth-century American liberals. Gaddis notes these contradictions without dwelling on them, thereby missing the chance to use Kennan’s ideas to shed light on the political world in which he so frequently if so uneasily participated.

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<sup>3</sup> Anders Stephanson, “Ideology and Neorealist Mirrors,” *Diplomatic History* 17:2 (April 1993): 288-89. DOI: 10.1111/j.1467-7709.1993.tb00552.x. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-7709.1993.tb00552.x>

When he joined the Institute for Advanced Study, Kennan took seriously the charge that he must become a scholar. He made what one critical historian called a “Pilgrimage to Clio”<sup>4</sup> with enviable success. His two-volume history of American-Russian relations in the aftermath of the Bolshevik Revolution was masterful in design and execution, based on extensive archival research as well as personal knowledge of the institutions (and many of the individuals) discussed. The first installment, *Russia Leaves the War: Soviet-American Relations, 1917-1920* (Princeton University Press, 1956) won a garland of awards, including the Pulitzer Prize and National Book Award—proof, Kennan wrote with typical self-deprecation, only of the paucity of quality nonfiction that year. Feted at historians’ meetings, invited to join the faculties of America’s most prestigious universities, Kennan’s career as a writer lasted far longer than his years in the Foreign Service. Indeed, Kennan’s history was joined later by a second Pulitzer and another National Book Award, this time in biography for *Memoirs, 1925-1950* (Little, Brown, 1967).

The second Pulitzer Prize speaks to the final reason why Kennan has been such a compelling historical subject: He devoted much of his own life to writing his life story. He drafted his first (unpublished) memoirs at the tender age of 34, while still a midlevel functionary at the American Embassy in Moscow, and before he had accomplished much of anything. Titled “Fair Day, Adieu!”—a quotation from one of Shakespeare’s historical plays—Kennan portentously declaimed about Russian character and Russian history, ending with his trip out of Russia, “turned loose in a Western civilization for which [he] had become definitely out of touch.”<sup>5</sup> At the top of the original manuscript, among his papers at Princeton University libraries, Kennan wrote a message to future historians who would be reading “Fair Day, Adieu!” In his small and delicate script, he reminded readers of its age (written in 1938) and the fact that it was “blanketed”<sup>6</sup> by Kennan’s Pulitzer Prize-winning memoir published 30 years later. Both memoirs are rich sources for historians—the unpublished one for what it revealed of Kennan’s sensibilities about Russia, and the published one for illustrating how Kennan understood his own ideas and importance. Writing with grace and elegance, Kennan managed to tone down his usual self-excoriation to mere modesty, and a gentlemanly modesty at that. The published memoirs (a second volume came out in 1972) were a first-rate literary achievement that offered a firsthand perspective on how the cold war had begun. What’s more, they appeared just as a debate raged among historians and policy makers on that question.

In other cases, Kennan went far beyond handwritten reminders. Soon after he authorized Princeton to open his personal papers to researchers in 1970, Kennan was, apparently, shocked that a young historian, C. Ben Wright, would focus so closely on a 1930s draft essay called “The Prerequisites.” It called for “an authoritarian state” (108) that denied

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<sup>4</sup> William Appleman Williams, review of *Realities of American Foreign Policy* by George F. Kennan, *Pacific Historical Review* 24:2 (May 1955): 211-212. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3634601>

<sup>5</sup> Kennan, “Fair Day, Adieu!” in George F. Kennan Papers (Mudd Library), box 25, folder 2.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

suffrage to those unable to wield it properly—that is, to immigrants, women, and blacks. Wright, who greatly admired Kennan, quoted extensively from “The Prerequisites” in his dissertation. Wright also had the temerity to suggest that Kennan’s version of containment might have a military component after all, using Kennan’s letters and speech drafts from the 1940s to support his interpretation. Kennan flew into a rage, trying to strike the offending quotations from Wright’s work and—in Gaddis’s telling—ultimately driving Wright out of the profession. The offending documents (if that is the right description) were removed from Kennan’s papers, and photocopying from the remainder of the collection was forbidden.

Not all of Kennan’s efforts to shape his own life, though, were directed toward covering up. When a precocious Princeton undergraduate wrote a thesis that attempted to piece together a philosophy from Kennan’s diffuse published and unpublished writings, Kennan responded with his own philosophical statement, published as *Around the Cragged Hill* (Norton, 1993). In modern parlance, Kennan tried to control his own narrative.

And, with Gaddis’s huge biography, Kennan in many ways continues to control the narrative, even from the grave. The effort began after Kennan and Gaddis agreed, in the early 1980s, that the historian would have exclusive access to a wealth of materials (more than 90 linear feet) that Kennan had not yet deposited in Princeton’s library. In exchange, there was a tacit agreement between biographer and subject that Gaddis’s book would appear posthumously. Gaddis makes extensive use of this remarkable cache of materials unavailable to other scholars: many volumes of Kennan’s diaries (kept over many decades), including his diaries recording his dreams. Kennan hoarded material on his own life—well into the 1980s, he kept research assistants busy clipping articles about him from around the world—and during his lifetime bestowed those materials on his biographer alone. For three decades, then, the richest materials about Kennan’s life were held in trust for Gaddis, one of the most honored and prolific diplomatic historians of his generation and one who has shared (in smaller doses, to be sure) Kennan’s concern with the challenges of undertaking an effective foreign policy in a democracy.

Even a historian with Gaddis’s experience, though, seems overwhelmed by the extent and richness of the sources available to him. The book itself takes its cue from its sources, and especially from Kennan’s diaries and letters written to, from, or about him in family circles. The biography is so full of its subject’s own words that Kennan still shapes the tone and pace of the chapters on the diplomat’s early life and rise through the Foreign Service ranks. As the diaries thin out during Kennan’s brief moment in the sun during the late 1940s, we learn less of Kennan’s interior thoughts and domestic arrangements and much more about his foreign policy. Then, for the second half of the biography, Kennan’s self-doubts return; by the time the retired diplomat meets his future biographer in the early 1980s, the diaries are filled with self-pity, self-excoriation, and increasingly frequent and elaborate visions of death. The biography provides such a good account of Kennan’s own perspective on his own life that Gaddis functions as much as amanuensis as he does as biographer.

For those in the field of Kennan studies—and I would count myself as a card-carrying member—the biography is at once revelatory and familiar. We knew of Kennan’s

propensity for self-criticism, but not necessarily its extent, frequency, and black depths. We wondered about his seventy-year marriage, but learn about his numerous affairs—serious enough to prompt his wife, Annelise, to travel to Nazi Germany to “save the marriage.” (133) We knew, from Wright’s notes on “The Prerequisites” and other writings that Kennan could not control, of the diplomat’s retrograde views of modern American life and those who lived it. Yet Gaddis’s biography reveals those views to be systematic and carefully thought out—if at the same time frequently channeled or papered over because of Kennan’s entirely reasonable fear that they might offend. In sum, much like the vaunted opening of the Soviet archives, the new material on Kennan seems more likely to confirm and add texture to previous conjectures than it will offer up surprises.

Yet that early assessment may change soon. The Princeton archive has already made available hundreds of boxes, including the diaries, long held back at Kennan’s insistence—and has made it easier on researchers by allowing photocopies. More important, the archive has launched a project, led by Gaddis’s fellow diplomatic historian Frank Costigliola of the University of Connecticut, to publish the diaries, which Gaddis rightly calls one of the most extended accounts of a twentieth-century American life now available.

Kennan’s combination of brutal self-examination and thin-skinned responses to critics (be they policy makers or historians) gives the impression that he hoped to have a monopoly on Kennan criticism. Surely aware that even a sympathetic scholar like Gaddis would have points of disagreement, Kennan protected himself by insuring the biography wouldn’t appear in his lifetime. While some books put an end to the study of a subject, it seems more likely that Gaddis’s monumental work marks only the beginning. We can now read Kennan not just for his powerful but fleeting influence on foreign policy, but also for social and psychological insights from one of the most introspective figures of modern American life. And who can predict what the future generations will make of the twentieth century’s most influential eighteenth-century man?

There are many moments in reading this vivid, personal biography of George F. Kennan when one has the sensation of listening to Kennan himself speaking. John Lewis Gaddis weaves into his narrative so many quotes from Kennan's diaries, interviews, letters, lecture notes, and publications that Kennan seems to jump out from the pages. Sadly, it is often a depressed, frustrated, alienated, or ill Kennan whose voice we hear, but we also follow the energetic and analytical Kennan as he experiences and interprets key events in Europe before, during and after World War II or makes his whirlwind speaking tour to the powers-that-be in Washington after the success of his February 1946 "long telegram." Gaddis tries to cover seemingly every aspect of Kennan's personal and professional life in his expansive biography. This review will focus on one issue that Gaddis, however, does not treat in a detailed way: the early development of Kennan's thinking about Russia.

Strange through it may be to say about this magisterial, 700-page biography, this reader found herself wanting to know more about the formation of Kennan's initial views on Russia. After all, Kennan is most famous for his analysis of Russia in both "the long telegram" and the X article published the following year, as well as his resulting prescription of U.S. policy to contain Russia, a policy that would form the foundation of U.S. foreign policy for the four decades of the Cold War. How did Kennan develop his views on the nature of the Soviet regime and the influences of Russian history on it? Were there certain professors with whom he studied, whether at Princeton or later in Berlin in graduate school, whose views impacted Kennan? Did he read certain works on Russia that particularly impressed him? Were there certain key moments in his time in Estonia and Latvia between 1928 and 1933 or in the neighboring Soviet Union that helped mold Kennan's views?

Except for Kennan's love of Russian literature and language, we do not learn the answers to these questions from Gaddis. For someone whose views on and expertise about the Soviet system became so important for U.S. policy, the reader wants to know more about Kennan's early learning and how it affected his analysis of Soviet rule. There are many parts of the book where Gaddis takes us along with Kennan as he experiences and thinks things through, but not in the initial formulation of his views on Russia. Did Gaddis not find much on this in his research in Kennan's papers? Did he not ask Kennan about this in their interviews? Did he think Kennan's critical skepticism about the Soviet regime was natural and that it was thus not worth probing into the process by which Kennan developed his assessment?

We learn from Gaddis, as Kennan also recounted in his memoirs, that once Kennan entered the State Department and then wanted to pursue a graduate degree in Europe, the Department offered to fund his studies if he chose to learn Chinese, Japanese, Arabic, or Russian. Kennan apparently chose Russian for two reasons: he assumed that eventually the U.S. would recognize the Soviet Union and need diplomats to serve there; and he also was inspired to follow in the footsteps of his grandfather's cousin, George Kennan, who

travelled widely in Russia, particularly Siberia, and became a Russia expert<sup>1</sup> (48). The reader of Gaddis' biography is curious to know how much the twenty-four year old Kennan already knew in 1928 about Russia and what his views about Russia were at this time. And how did his views develop while serving with the State Department in Tallinn, Berlin and Riga and while studying at the University of Berlin? Gaddis tells us very little about this. Did the Estonians and Latvians he met in the Baltic states and the Russian and Ukrainian émigrés he met in Berlin all have critical views from personal experience with Russia and the Soviet Union that rubbed off on Kennan? It would have been interesting to learn about this.<sup>2</sup>

And later, how did Kennan feel upon entering the Soviet Union for the first time in 1933 after having studied the country from afar for five and half years? Gaddis does not tell us. Given that Kennan was so reflective and that Gaddis describes so many personal moments in the book, it is surprising not to have any description of what must have been a profound moment for Kennan. Gaddis treats us to Kennan's diary entry eleven years later when he returned to serve under Ambassador Averell Harriman at the embassy in Moscow in the summer of 1944: "I sat glued to the window [in the plane], moved and fascinated to see before me again this great, fertile, mysterious country which I had spent so many years trying to understand." (177) But we do not learn about Kennan's thoughts upon his first arrival in 1933. Once Kennan serves at the embassy in Moscow in 1933, we learned much more about his views on the Soviet regime and its policies, but these views seem to spring rather fully developed in Gaddis' account. Gaddis recounts a diary entry from June 1932 in Riga (66) where Kennan is walking home "past the dirty tenements, which remind one so of Russia," yet Kennan had not yet been to Russia. The reader is left wondering where he got his view of "dirty tenements" in Russia.<sup>3</sup>

How did Kennan's studies at Princeton and the University of Berlin contribute to his developing views of the Soviet government and its policies? Gaddis does not tell us very much about this. Of Princeton, Kennan writes in his memoirs nothing about studying Russia and notes that he left Princeton without "anything very much in the way of settled opinions, conclusions, or certainties in the field of public affairs."<sup>4</sup> He does, however, note that "some of the subject matter has even stuck in my mind to the present day" from studying with "Prof. Joseph C. Green at Princeton whose freshman course Historical Introduction focused on the effect of such things as climate, geography and resources on

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<sup>1</sup> George F. Kennan, *Memoirs, 1925-1950* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1967), 23.

<sup>2</sup> In his memoirs, Kennan says he finds it hard to write about those years, since he "was obscure" and his "friends were obscure." *Memoirs*, 24.

<sup>3</sup> The Baltic states had been part of the Russian empire, and Kennan recounts in his memoirs that Riga in particular still had the atmosphere of czarist Russia and was a "minor edition of [St.] Petersburg. . . . It was one of those cases where the copy had survived the original. To live in Riga was thus in many respects to live in Tsarist Russia . . ." Kennan, *Memoirs*, 29-30. This may answer the reader's question.

<sup>4</sup> Kennan, *Memoirs*, 16.

the character of human civilizations.”<sup>5</sup> One can see the influence of this course on Kennan’s later analyses of Russia, as in the long telegram when he writes of “the Kremlin’s neurotic view of world affairs” coming from a “traditional and instinctive Russian sense of insecurity” that was “originally . . . [the] insecurity of a peaceful agricultural people trying to live on vast exposed plain in [a] neighborhood of fierce nomadic peoples.”<sup>6</sup>

In his studies in Berlin, the State Department urged Kennan to focus on Russian history, language, and literature, and when Kennan asked whether he should also take the courses offered on the Soviet Union, interestingly he was told not to<sup>7</sup> (55). With Russian émigré tutors in Berlin, Kennan read the classics of Russian literature. Did he discuss the Soviet or the czarist regimes with them? What stories did they tell him? And what about his conversations with his Ukrainian émigré teacher of Russian while he was in Estonia? This reader would be very curious to know more about how Kennan developed his views on Russia, views which would become so influential. Gaddis cites a letter Kennan wrote in 1931 to a friend in the Foreign Service saying that “there can be no possible middle ground or compromise between” the U.S. and U.S.S.R. and that the communists “had abandoned the ship of western European civilization like a swarm of rats.” (58) Gaddis shares with us Kennan’s conclusions, but not the process by which he reached them.

Gaddis does a wonderful job of de-constructing the long telegram and the X article and other later policy papers and public views expressed by Kennan. It would have been fascinating to read the kind of personal details about the early development of Kennan’s views on Russia as we learn from Gaddis about Kennan’s later thought processes on policy toward Russia. Perhaps Gaddis tried to engage Kennan on this and Kennan’s memory was not up to it, or perhaps Gaddis did not investigate this issue.

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<sup>5</sup> Kennan, *Memoirs*, 14.

<sup>6</sup> Excerpts from “Telegraphic Message from Moscow of 22 February 1946,” reprinted in Kennan, *Memoirs*, 549-550.

<sup>7</sup> Kennan, *Memoirs*, 31-33.



Review by Walter Hixson, University of Akron

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It is no surprise to find John Gaddis making important contributions to diplomatic history and inspiring analysis and commentary in return. It is doubly no surprise because his authorized biography on George F. Kennan has been in the works for some three decades.

Having done substantial work on Kennan myself, I found few revelations in Gaddis's book. I had not known about Kennan's extramarital flirtations and liaisons but I am uninterested in Kennan's private life as opposed to his intellectual life, though it is certainly fair game for a full-blown biography and Gaddis handles the family issues well.

Even though there are few if any revelations, Gaddis deserves credit for his exhaustive research including interviews and analysis of Kennan's prodigious diaries. The book is well written but lacks the verve we would expect from veteran historical popularizers such as David McClellan, Michael Beschloss, or H.W. Brands. But Gaddis, as always, offers trenchant and provocative analysis. The biography ultimately fails, however, to capture the "whole" George Kennan though it well captures the parts of Kennan that Gaddis likes.

National patriotism and Cold War vindicationism are strong themes in Gaddis's oeuvre and they are also strong themes in the life of George Kennan. Gaddis brings these themes out exceedingly well and commends Kennan for his "greatness" in conceptualizing containment and grasping the "realities" of the Soviet Union in the early Cold War (693-98).

There is another strong theme in Kennan, however, and that is deep suspicion of popular opinion, democratic government, and American exceptionalism. Kennan manifested these aspects of his thought again and again, often eliciting condemnation but at the same time establishing himself as a cold war critic and iconoclast. Gaddis takes note but does not approve of this side of his subject hence these aspects are marginalized throughout his life of Kennan and dismissed as "repetitive rants" (697) in the conclusion.

Kennan was a complex and contradictory man whose public life contained the elements of a Greek tragedy. His hard-line containment strategy launched the Cold War and made him famous but it also set in motion a militarized national security state and prolonged division of Europe that Kennan deplored. He never escaped the legacy of containment even though he spent only a couple of years as a foreign policy insider and *more than a half-century* as a critic of U.S. foreign policy.

The authorized biography might well have sorted out this stunning paradox in meaningful ways but this really is not the story Gaddis wants to narrate. Gaddis devotes nearly 500 pages to the first fifty years of Kennan's life, through his time in government, and just over 200 pages to the rest of his life when he was in his intellectual prime.

I think this is a serious weakness of the biography and revealing of Gaddis's own prejudices. But it is Gaddis's biography and he certainly has the right to write it the way he

wants to—even if Kennan himself cultivated serious doubts about the biographer that he selected. Revealingly, as Frank Costigliola has pointed out, in 2000 Kennan wrote that Gaddis “had no idea of what was really at stake” in the “long battle I was waging . . . against the almost total militarization of Western policy toward Russia.”<sup>1</sup> Gaddis has never had much patience with cold war critics and this includes the subject of his biography.

Kennan himself was never comfortable acknowledging how much of what he came to deplore he had been responsible for setting in motion. He was always being misunderstood, you see. The Princeton sage vacillated back and forth, with periodic outbursts against Soviet actions that reminded us of Mr. X only to retreat back to the Institute of Advanced Study to write often-brilliant dissections of American culture and diplomacy.

What is most striking about Kennan--and still poorly understood, even after several books, long obituaries, and now the authorized biography--is the profound irony that a man so deeply alienated from his own culture is best known for articulating an enduring vision of national foreign policy. Despite his call for Washington to take the lead in containing communism, Kennan’s writings dating back to the 1930s reveal that he actually had little faith in the ability of the United States to function effectively as a global power.

Who can forget Kennan’s metaphor of U.S. foreign policy as brontosaurus, a prehistoric brute whose thrashing tail reaped destruction at every turn, unchecked by its tiny and ineffectual brain? In contrast, Kennan deeply admired the Germans and once complained that “what was wrong with Hitler’s new order was that it was Hitler’s” and not that of a traditional authoritarian German regime.<sup>2</sup> Kennan ultimately concluded that the problem with the United States was democracy itself and he advocated “a high degree of *dirigisme*, a strengthening of the hand of government, which is quite foreign to our habits and concepts.”<sup>3</sup> By the 1970s he concluded the United States, “honeycombed with bewilderment,” had “nothing to teach the world.”<sup>4</sup> On the fortieth anniversary of the X-Article in 1987, Kennan declared, “The first thing we Americans need to learn to contain is, in some ways, ourselves.”<sup>5</sup>

Despite his association with the “realist” school of diplomacy, Kennan thus is best understood as an alienated foreign policy intellectual and social critic. To me this is the

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<sup>1</sup> Frank Costigliola, “Is This George Kennan?” *New York Review of Books*, 8 December 2011.

<sup>2</sup> Walter L. Hixson, *George F. Kennan: Cold War Iconoclast* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 88.

<sup>3</sup> Hixson, *George F. Kennan*, 246.

<sup>4</sup> Hixson, *George F. Kennan*, 256.

<sup>5</sup> Hixson, *George F. Kennan*, 305.

“real” George Kennan, one that offers a great deal of insight into the flaws and contradictions of American diplomacy.

In a surprisingly brief conclusion Gaddis rightfully notes Kennan’s tremendous contributions in a long life well lived. A renowned strategist, an accomplished historian, and a gifted often-poetic writer, Kennan ultimately is best described as a “teacher,” Gaddis concludes (697). It is a not terribly evocative or imaginative label for a life as rich and complex as Kennan’s. I much prefer a trope put forward by Stanley Hoffmann many years ago--he described Kennan as a “national treasure.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Walter L. Hixson, “George F. Kennan: In Memoriam,” *SHAFR Newsletter* March 2003.

Both George Kennan and his latest biographer, John Lewis Gaddis, have long been the focus of attention by political scientists and historians. Many students of international politics dream of being the next George Kennan, either as the architect of policy or as the dissenter-in-chief. John Gaddis, too, excites both professional jealousy and political reaction, partly because his books have reached far beyond the academy. In founding post-revisionism with a focus on the importance of American domestic politics, then in seeing the Soviet Union as primarily responsible for the conflict, and finally in sympathizing with George W. Bush's policies, Gaddis has consistently cut against the grain of prevailing opinion in the historical community.

I will comment more on Kennan than on Gaddis, but should note that it takes more expertise than I possess to say, not where Gaddis is wrong, but what he has left out. It is clear, however, that every serious student of the period should read the book, and I cannot imagine anyone coming away without ideas, insights, and new thinking. The book is engrossing and stimulating.

It is not, however, a history of the Cold War, and does not pretend to be. There is no way to move directly from this account to conclusions about the wisdom or even the impact of most policies, either those that Kennan urged or those that the U.S. followed. Unlike some of his earlier books, especially *We Now Know*,<sup>1</sup> here Gaddis plays little attention to what the Soviets were actually thinking and planning. Although a bit frustrating, this omission is justified in a biography. Gaddis is trying to explain how Kennan saw the world and behaved; whether he was right or wrong is not his primary concern. Indeed, for better and for worse, Gaddis is remarkably non-judgmental. Explaining Kennan is not easy, especially for those who link his preferred policies to his personal characteristics because the former changed in a way that the latter did not, a puzzle to which I will return.

Perhaps the most obvious question to ask of a Kennan biography is: why? Has there ever been a case of such a disproportion between the attention showered on a diplomat/scholar/commentator and his impact on politics as is true here? Part of the answer is that Kennan was such an interesting person, and the mysteries grow rather than shrink once we see the diaries and private papers that Gaddis uses so well. A second reason is that "his skill as a writer" (696) was such that policy-makers and members of the general public wanted to read him and, I believe, biographers were drawn to him because studying his record would be such a pleasure. Third, living for a century and having participated in crucial events and writing about others, he presents a canvas of enormous scope.

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<sup>1</sup> John Lewis Gaddis, *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

But does he merit all this attention? To start with the most obvious, his “Long Telegram” and “X” article articulated much of the approach--what Gaddis calls a grand strategy--that the U.S. would follow throughout the Cold War. Of course “containment” was ambiguous from the start, Kennan claims that he was misunderstood (a topic Gaddis covers well), and, as Gaddis has shown earlier, containment came in at least two major variants, one that required meeting all challenges where they occurred and other that sought to reply to threats and dangers by means and places of American choosing.<sup>2</sup> But, as Gaddis shows, Kennan’s impact here has often been misunderstood. It was not to alert Washington to the danger of Soviet expansionism. This was already clear to many in Washington and would soon enough have been apparent thanks to Stalin’s behavior. Rather, the contribution was in showing that there was a way out, a path between appeasement and inevitable war. Stalin would expand the Soviet sphere if he could, but wanted peace, partly because he believed that communism would triumph in the end. If in retrospect this seems obvious, it was not at the time. Leaders looking back from 1945 saw only devastating wars interrupted by an attempt of conciliation that only made things worse, and there were no examples of a prolonged but extremely tense stalemate, let alone one that would end in the collapse of the adversary. It took imagination, insight, and daring to say that such an outcome was not only possible, but was within reach if the U.S. followed a firm but measured policy. As Gregory Mitrovich argued, the intelligence establishment was also stressing that Stalin needed peace,<sup>3</sup> but Kennan’s arguments were early, articulate, and authoritative. Gaddis’ summary is on target: Kennan said that “all that would be required [from the U.S.] was ‘long-term, patient but firm and vigilant containment of Russian expansionist tendencies.’ Anyone could have written that sentence. Only Kennan could have made it believable” (695).

In his subsequent service as the first director of the State Department’s Policy Planning Staff, he produced an incredible range and number of lucid papers and weighed in on all the major issues of these formative years. While he undoubtedly deserves great credit for his intellectual efforts, the impact on policy is less clear, however. On many crucial issues like the Marshall Plan and the “Reverse Course” in Japan where policy conformed to his advice, many others were saying essentially the same things, albeit less eloquently. On NATO and policy toward Germany, he was in the minority and although Secretary of State Acheson gave his views more of a hearing than either Kennan or Acheson later acknowledged, in the end they did not prevail. Gaddis generally agrees with the detailed and judicious account of Wilson Miscamble to paint a picture of influence that is very great by the standard of what would be expected from a high-level diplomat, but not so great as to merit multiple biographies.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: a critical appraisal of American national security policy during the Cold War*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982; 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, 2005).

<sup>3</sup> Gregory Mitrovich, *Undermining the Kremlin: America’s Strategy to Subvert the Soviet Bloc, 1947-1956* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2000).

<sup>4</sup> Wilson Miscamble, *George F. Kennan and the Making of American Foreign Policy, 1947-1950* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992).

The third period of influence was very brief and overlooked by many scholars. The outbreak of the Korean War led Kennan to return to the State Department from the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton and jump into day-to-day, and even hour-to-hour, policy-making. Gaddis' summary is again convincing:

His role in the Korean War, Kennan wrote later, had been 'relatively minor,' but that was an understatement. For on several issues—his recommendation to deploy the Seventh Fleet in the Taiwan Strait, his concerns about crossing the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel, his warnings about MacArthur, his advice against negotiating after the Chinese had intervened, and his reversal of that advice after the Chinese had been contained, and his delicate conversations with [the chief Soviet representative at the UN, Jacob] Malik—he won a degree of respect within the government that he had not enjoyed since 1947 (428-29).

Indeed, it is worth pausing here to note that although Kennan is best known as a planner and a long-range thinker, he was highly skilled at negotiating and solving immediate problems. His first major achievement was skillfully handling the negotiations with Portugal for basing rights in the Azores, in which he first disobeyed his instructions and then returned to Washington and persuaded his superiors of the wisdom of his approach. Indeed, his best work may have been done when he faced concrete problems that forced him to concentrate and tether his grander if not grandiose ideas (397).

Ironically for a diplomat, Kennan may have had his greatest impact when he left the government. He himself summed up his various careers by placing them “under the heading of teacher” (697; 692), and his pupils included leaders, the general public, and college students. His *American Diplomacy 1900-1950*,<sup>5</sup> although an inferior work of history (it was his first, and he realized that he was just a beginner), had enormous impact, but more important to the educated public than his later books (many of them excellent historical monographs), were his interventions into public debates. He put the topic of disengagement in Germany in the public mind; his opposition to war in Vietnam, especially when joined to Hans Morgenthau's, showed that one did not have to be a radical to see the war as a terrible error; his alarm about the danger of war during the Reagan years similarly emboldened the opposition. On these issues, his main contribution was not to persuade, but to widen the scope of legitimate discussion, to put on the agenda ideas and alternatives that would otherwise have seemed beyond the pale. He was quite wrong to dismiss his influence on American public life as “undetected” (631).

Some of the reason for Kennan's success was his style. This went beyond his writing ability. As Gaddis summarizes, in both personal life and foreign policy, “how one did things was as important as what one did.” As Kennan put it in a lecture: “Where purpose is dim and questionable, form comes into its own.” Good manners, which might seem “an inferior means of salvation, may be the only means of salvation we have at all” (417). As he told

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<sup>5</sup> George Frost Kennan, *American Diplomacy 1900-1950* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951).

Acheson when the latter was under great strain after the Chinese intervention in Korea, “in international, as in private, life, what counts most is not really what happens to someone but how he bears what happens to him” (413). Because of “the growing disproportion between man’s moral nature and the forces subject to this control,” style was central since “means could corrupt ends,” in Gaddis’ words (373; also see 246).

Personal and professional seemed to be fused here. When Kennan was not engaged in extramarital affairs, he was thinking of them, which is less unusual than his anguish. The need for, and difficulties of, self-control were a major part of his life, and I do not think it was an accident that he saw American foreign policy as emotional and prone to swing between extremes. Kennan’s famous analogy between the U.S. and a dinosaur (in the old understanding of these beasts) in being slow to be aroused but when it was to thrashing around and doing great damage to those who had provoked it and the wider environment applies better to Kennan’s own personality. As Kennan wrote to a friend in 1957, “I am a person who rouses himself to intellectual activity only when he is stung. The more outraged I become at the preposterousness of the things other people say the better I do.”<sup>6</sup>

Perhaps for this reason, he was careful to keep his own criticisms of American policy as calm and cool as possible. Although he shared their opposition to the war in Vietnam, he abhorred the new left protestors because of their “transports of passion,” considering that they reflected the “sickly secularism” of American society and had developed an “extreme disbalance in emotional and intellectual growth” (608, 610). But, much as everyone admired his intellectualism, this was a flaw that close observers detected in Kennan himself. As a top subordinate in Kennan’s brief service as ambassador to Moscow—service terminated by his emotional outburst that insulted the Soviets—put it: “George is...a highly emotional person. It’s a strange combination of a well-drilled mind, a fine command of the English language, and yet shot through all of this is this emotional response to external stimuli, which somehow or another his well-drilled mind doesn’t seem able to control” (453). Thus Kennan was prone to take everything personally: he even thought that the extreme anti-American atmosphere he found when he became ambassador to the USSR in 1952 was in part a reaction to his appointment. The economic counselor under him when he was ambassador to Yugoslavia wrote in his diary: “I am attached to the man as a person... [and] the essentially long term soundness of his judgments.” But “I am repelled by his self-centered egoism, ...his mercurial moods, his meticulous arrogance” (570). Kennan’s praise for style and stoicism in diplomacy I think reflected partial but incomplete self-awareness. If he did not understand how much he let his emotions show, he did understand that they were always just beneath the surface, and that they could do great damage. Without suggesting that he merely projected his inner struggle on world politics, I do think it helps to explain his stress on the importance of style in diplomacy in suppressing impulses that would endanger the state and others, keeping open lines of communication, and enabling a search for compromise.

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<sup>6</sup> Quoted in Frank Costigliola, “‘Unceasing Pressure for Penetration’: Gender, Pathology, and Emotion in George Kennan’s Formation of the Cold War,” *Journal of American History*, vol. 83 (March 1997), p. 1331.

The reaction of Kennan's subordinates is understandable, but emotion is not the opposite of rationality and does not necessarily interfere with the quality of policies. This common view was endorsed by scholarly research in the past, but psychologists now see a wider and necessary role for emotion not only in animating a meaningful life, but in guiding intelligent decisions. Kennan himself was ambivalent on this score. While he attacked emotionalism, he did not seem phased by the common criticism that he was too emotional. Indeed, his love for Russian culture and literature was not unrelated to his affinity for living emotionally, especially in contrast to what he characterized as "this thin, tight, lonely American life" (514).

Kennan's awareness of the power of emotions may help explain his deep concern with individual and national psychology. I believe that this, along with history and religion (discussed below) are the pillars of the way he thought. In this light it is not surprising that he starts the "X" article by declaring it to be a "psychological analysis," and psychology played a crucial role in his belief—or perhaps I should say faith—that if contained the Soviet empire would eventually decay from within. Edward Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, which he read and re-read on his frequent trips across the Atlantic during World War II, reinforced his instincts about human nature and the belief he formed when he witnessed the Nazi take-over of Prague in 1939. Empires, he felt, were very hard to maintain in the face of nationalism and self-assertion on the one hand and the waning of the ideological fervor that was necessary to sustain them on the other. According to Gaddis, applying "counter pressure" to the USSR was designed to produce "a psychological change in the mind of the adversary" (284, emphasis in the original). In retrospect, of course, he was correct, but the validity of this view was hardly self-evident, and while many others came to endorse containment, few seconded his prediction as it seemed to lack material and solid foundations.

Another aspect of Kennan's focus on psychology explains further inconsistencies (and consistencies), insights, and grounds for disagreement, which he also failed to understand. Partly because he was confident that the Soviets feared war, he was less worried about military imbalances than were his colleagues. Despite sometimes urging conventional build-ups, in part to avoid over-reliance on nuclear weapons, more often his claim for how to deal with Soviet conventional superiority paralleled his faith in style and equanimity. This came through most clearly in his resistance to forming NATO. There was no need for a military alliance, he felt. As he explained later in his memoirs he should have told his State Department colleagues:

All right, the Russians are well armed and we are poorly armed. So what? We are like a man who has let himself into a walled garden and finds himself alone there with a dog with very big teeth. The dog, for the moment, shows no signs of aggressiveness. The best thing for us to do is surely to try to establish, as between the two of us, the assumption that the teeth have nothing whatsoever to do with our mutual relationship--that they are neither here nor there (quoted on 321).



If the Americans persuaded themselves (and presumably the Europeans) that the Soviet advantage did not matter, then it would not, because their confidence would be unimpaired. One does not have to be a social constructivist to grasp the logic, but the power of perceptions does mean that one has to act on others' understanding of the situation. Thus Kennan believed that the U.S. had to fight in Korea despite his view that the peninsula was unimportant and urged that the U.S. protect Formosa (he may have been the first to take this position, Gaddis tells us (397)) because of the psychological rather than the material impact of doing otherwise. Here the policy Kennan advocated was hard-line, but the way of thinking had not changed.

One reason why he opposed nuclear build-ups and, in what he called his most important paper, the development of thermonuclear weapons, was the belief that they would weigh too heavily in policy and policy-making. Reliance on nuclear weapons would require extraordinary measures to endow the threats to use them with even a modicum of credibility. This would make moderation more difficult, undercut the ability to distinguish vital from peripheral interests, and render a flexible and subtle policy impossible in the face of the need to convince the Soviets that, against all logic, the U.S. would fight. Nuclear weapons would then induce a psychology that was not only dangerous, but that was inimical to relaxing tensions, reducing American burdens, and returning to a more normal form of politics.

But if this analysis was correct, then once the U.S. did go down the road that Kennan believed led to the need for credibility to play such a large role, he should have seen that we were now in an era in which his preferred policy prescriptions could no longer apply. This conclusion was unacceptable, however, and Kennan could not bring himself to see that diplomacy could be hemmed in by the way that others would interpret American moves.

This is particularly clear in his opposition to the formation of a Western military alliance at the start of the Cold War. Being sure that even Stalin would not start a war, he could not accept the claim that the U.S. had to accommodate itself to others' psychology. Behind closed doors Truman and his top advisors argued for NATO not because they thought an attack was likely in its absence, but because they believed that without it the West, Europeans would be too consumed by fear to focus on the task of economic and political reconstruction. The purpose of NATO was less to deter the Soviet Union than to reassure allies, and it was to their psychology that the alliance—really just a paper guarantee until it was militarized after the start of the Korean War—was tuned. Kennan recognized this, but in the end could not accept that these considerations would have to guide policy.<sup>7</sup>

Neither, of course, could he accept the war in Vietnam, underpinned as it was by the domino theory. Fortunately, its validity can be put aside here;<sup>8</sup> the point is that he never

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<sup>7</sup> Robert Jervis, *The Meaning of the Nuclear Revolution* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989), pp. 206-12.

<sup>8</sup> I have done so in Jack Snyder and Robert Jervis, eds., *Dominoes and Bandwagons: Strategic Beliefs and Great Power Competition in the Eurasian Rimland* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991) and *System*

fully came to grips with the argument that the world was tightly inter-connected in a way that made it very hard to write off any part of it as unimportant because of the inferences that various audiences would draw from a perceived communist gain—in other words, that the U.S. had to concentrate on psychology, partly because of the unfortunate weight of credibility induced by nuclear weapons. It would not have been absurd for someone to have argued from Kennan's premises to the conclusion that beating back communism in South Vietnam was crucial to destroying the Soviets' confidence and that, conversely, a communist victory would renew the faith that Soviet leaders and the public had in their own system and lead them to try to nudge along the forces of history. In fact, this is what happened, at the cost of the *détente* that Kennan had supported.

Psychology—both his own and his reading and others'—may help explain his famous change from architect of containment to critic of it. Of course Kennan would dispute this description and claim that both his superiors and those who attacked the "X" article as being too sweeping and too focused on the military had misunderstood him. But neither his language there nor the policies he supported in 1946 and early 1947 lent themselves to restraint. Although in some formulations he did clearly say that only certain areas of the world were worth contesting, he also recognized the psychological effects of events elsewhere and never provided guidelines for when and where the U.S. would be well-advised not to contest advances of Soviet power or indigenous Communist forces. The degree to which such developments would produce an accretion of Soviet material power would be slight (and less significant in light of the role of nuclear weapons, a factor that ironically Kennan felt was unfortunate), but they could affect how elites and publics around the globe felt that the world was moving. This was largely a matter of psychology, and since the reading of others' psychology is especially difficult it would not be surprising if Kennan's estimates reflected his own moods and beliefs.

If concern for psychology, although sometimes inconsistently applied, was one constant in Kennan's thought, another was the importance of history in both determining national behavior and helping observers understand the world. He did not start out, of course, as an historian, although he was wise enough to have been impressed by a course from Raymond Sontag, then beginning his career. (I cannot resist adding that I was fortunate enough to take his classes when he was finishing it.) Robert Kelley, who trained Kennan and his colleagues, stressed the importance of history and culture, and Kennan went on to learn Russian history very well. Although his first book was poor, his temperament and skills lent themselves to the discipline, and his later studies were truly perceptive. What he came away with—and what I think he already knew when he was a diplomat—was the understanding that current behavior often had deep roots in the past, that different leaders and different countries often saw the same situation very differently, and that there was an enormous disconnect between intentions and consequences. Policies often misfired, and statecraft required flexibility. It was perhaps this sense, combined with his heightened critical faculties, that accounts for some of his apparent inconsistencies. I think Gaddis is

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*Effects: Complexity in Political and Social Life* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997), pp. 21-27, 266-71.

right that Kennan “had a historian’s consciousness, which gave him a visionary’s perspective on the future” (215), but this contributed to why others, who had a different approach, often rejected his conclusions and were puzzled by his thought processes.

Kennan’s historical approach is well known. Gaddis brings out another dimension that is not. This is Kennan’s religious faith. Although he never railed against “Godless communism,” religion was important to his life, to his sense of what he and his country were, and, at least in part, to his views of world politics. The last effect is hard to pin down, and Gaddis does not explicitly talk about it. Contrary to most contemporary Realists, Kennan, Morgenthau, and the other “founders” of this school of thought were deeply concerned with morality, and many looked to Reinhold Niebuhr for inspiration and guidance. They were stung by the criticism that their preferred policies were amoral if not immoral, but they also knew that purity was impossible in politics. For Kennan, perhaps, the perceived gap between private life and politics was less than it was for some of his peers who often contrasted the requirements of international politics with the possibility of personal morality. In describing his paternal ancestors as lacking the “self-discipline to learn to sin gracefully and with dignity, rather than to try unsuccessfully not to sin at all” (13), Kennan was surely thinking of his own struggles, especially over marital fidelity.

In politics, he felt, sometimes a country should avoid legitimating evil, even if this came at the cost of some influence. If calling other states (accurate) names, like Reagan’s labeling the Soviet Union “an evil Empire” would not cleanse the speaker or make the world better, then neither should one become complicit. Thus in the frustrating period at the end of World War II when the Soviet Union was establishing its control over Eastern Europe in general and Poland in particular, Kennan concluded that negotiations were useless and agreed with presidential aide Harry Hopkins’ summary of his views about how the U.S. should respond: “then you think it’s just sin, and we should be agin it” (202; also see 200). This seemingly passive stance was politically unacceptable, but morally did have much to be said for it, and it fit with the role Kennan adopted in the last twenty years of his life as being “a prophet” (654). In parallel with seeking not to have any truck with sin, in his last significant but little-read book, *Around the Cragged Hill: A Personal and Political Philosophy*, he discusses his religious beliefs at some length and acknowledged the presence of “little demons.” In Gaddis’ paraphrase, “one could not simply brush them away. One could, however, deny them the satisfaction of having their existence acknowledged” and “simply go on with the real work we know we have to do,” as Kennan put it (686, 495).

The ways of thinking that built on style, emotion, psychology, history, and religion may help explain why Kennan wrote the Long Telegram and the “X” article as not only interpretive, but with remarkably little grounding in specific Soviet behaviors and no gestures to competing claims. The contrast to perhaps the most famous similar paper in Western diplomatic history, Eyre Crowe’s analysis of German behavior and intentions in January 1907, is stark. The latter works in close detail and, although not devoid of sweeping statements about German history and politics, is much more rooted in the international interactions of the preceding years. Kennan, of course, could have assumed that his readers would know all the events that his message claimed to explain, but Crowe’s readers were equally familiar with the history. Although Gaddis does not draw the contrast, he

shows that Kennan was much more of an intuitive thinker, and one who knew the importance of rhetoric. Indeed, in these papers his approach is not so much that of a diplomat or analyst as it is an anthropologist who uses the method of “thick description,” to use Clifford Geertz’s term. The argument becomes convincing through layers of evocative interpretation.

Turning to substance and Kennan’s dissent from U.S. Cold War policy, his campaign against nuclear weapons built on his opposition to developing the H-bomb and the related belief that American policy was excessively militarized. Although Gaddis does not directly discuss this issue, it seems to me that much of our evaluation of Kennan’s judgment here turns on how dangerous we think the Cold War was. In contrast to those who believed that nuclear weapons were stabilizing and that mutual deterrence could hold, Kennan, like the hard-liners whom he so disagreed with, was less sanguine. He had argued that followed sensibly, containment could keep the peace for as long as was necessary for the Soviet Union to mellow. But the U.S. rarely was sensible, and from the time he left office until the end of the Cold War Kennan thought—or felt—that the danger of war was unacceptably high. Indeed, he began his projected three-volume study of the origins of World War I in order to show that deterrence could not keep the peace indefinitely (618), and he even saw in the collapse of Soviet power in 1989 the danger of nuclear war (673). Of course it did not occur, and so his warnings now seem disproportionate and shrill. But he may not have been wrong. Perhaps we just were lucky; if you play Russian roulette and survive this does not mean that you behaved sensibly.

Fear of war was one of the sources of Kennan’s other signature dissent, his call for withdrawing Soviet and American troops from central Europe and reunifying Germany, what became known as “disengagement.” Indeed, Kennan’s first major losing battle in the post-war years was his sponsorship of “Program A,” which would have had the U.S. work for a united and neutral Germany rather than proceed with NATO. His prescriptions were driven by the belief that the Germans—with whom he always had sympathy—deserved a united country and that it was unhealthy for both the U.S. and the Europeans that the former should exert so much control over the latter. He also thought that Nikita Khrushchev’s USSR had mellowed and that containment had succeeded sufficiently to permit moving to the next phase. But, even more, he was driven by his fears. The continued division of Germany could only harden the lines of the Cold War, accelerate the arms race, and greatly increase the chance of war. Like his initial idea of containment, disengagement was to be a middle path between appeasement and war. His advocacy of it was based less on its perceived promise than on how awful the alternatives were (529).

In this I think Kennan made several linked misjudgments. He overestimated the West German willingness to at least temporarily accept the division of their country and when, under Willy Brandt’s leadership, they followed an *Ostpolitik*, to do so without severing their bonds to the West. (For Kennan’s misreading of German opinion, see 350-51.) Even the Western outpost in Berlin was maintained despite the crises it produced. Gaddis is quite right that to have predicted all this in the first decade of the Cold War (or indeed later) would have been bold to the point of foolishness (403; also see 655). The search for alternatives certainly was merited.

But I doubt that Kennan's would have been less dangerous. A united, neutral, and armed Germany would have decreased rather than increased European stability. The other powers would have deeply worried about nationalists if not fascists regaining power and simultaneously courted what would have been the most powerful country in the region. And would this Germany have been content within the borders World War II's victors had established and with being denied the nuclear weapons they possessed? Perhaps it would have and the resultant history would have been a happy or at least an acceptable one. Kennan never really confronted the objections to his position, however, despite having recognized this kind of danger when arguing against what he saw as the "shallow and often unrealistic" American policies in 1944 (174). Although defending his ideas well, he nevertheless downplays the risks of the interaction between German nationalism and superpower competition, even in the moderated form expected in the wake of disengagement.<sup>9</sup>

Kennan usually found himself—or placed himself—in the minority. With the exception of John Kennedy, who appointed Kennan ambassador to Yugoslavia and met with him an astonishing fourteen times, American presidents could never seem to do the right thing. They were too conciliatory or too unyielding, too quick to approach the Soviets and too resistant to doing so, too concerned with domestic politics or too slow to appreciate the importance of domestic support. In part, I think this was due to Kennan seeing his mission as mid-course correction, to use the phrase that Alexander George deployed when explaining to me some of what I thought were contradictions in the thinking of Bernard Brodie (whose views of nuclear weapons had some similarity to Kennan's, perhaps because Brodie influenced him). If Kennan felt U.S. policy was veering too much in one direction or the other, he tried to push it back; and he almost did feel that way, in part because of his sense that even if things were going well, the U.S. should be able to do better (484, 697).

Gaddis suggests three other reasons for Kennan's political shifts, none of them flattering. First, he was unable "to insulate his jobs from his moods.... He viewed the world through himself...[which] could lead to great insights: Kennan's understanding of the Soviet Union and how to contain it grew largely out of his own self-analysis. But it could also produce volatility" (p. 336). Second, his view of American foreign policy tended to reflect his evaluation of American society, which was more stable and darker than his own moods. How could a decaying society produce an effective foreign policy? Third, his pride that the containment strategy had been adopted may have led him to believe that it quickly had produced the intended effect and that the Soviet Union, even under Stalin, was ready to negotiate and even pull back from Eastern Europe.

Kennan's inconsistencies may also both reflect changed circumstances and learning on his part as well as being rooted in consistent values and preferences. In 1945 Kennan had dissented from policy in urging the acceptance of spheres of influence; by late 1948 he was dissenting by rejecting them. It may have been the means rather than the ends that

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<sup>9</sup> George Kennan, "Disengagement Revisited," *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 37 (January 1959), pp. 187-210.

changed, however. “The truth Kennan recognized [by 1948]...was one his own mind had missed until this point; that the division of Germany, which he had been advocating since 1945 as a way of restoring a balance of power in Europe, was in fact removing power from Europe, concentrating it instead in the hands of the United States and the Soviet Union” (330, emphasis in the original). This he could not abide. Europe would be infantilized and the fate of the world would rest in the hands of two immature and irresponsible powers.

Gaddis here gets at one of what I think are three guiding principles on which Kennan was consistent—and probably correct. It was not healthy—and in all likelihood not possible—for Europe to be kept in a subordinate position forever. As a proud continent with a rich if troubled history, it was unthinkable that its destiny would be guided by outsiders. While this position was held by many others, Kennan’s outlook was particularly intense because of his admiration for much that was European and his revulsion at so many facets of American politics and culture. Second, even as he was urging his superiors to take a stiffer line with Stalin during World War II, he never thought that military threats needed to be central. Adequate force of course was necessary, but it was to be kept in the background and had to be an adjunct to rather than a replacement for diplomacy. He was confident that even Stalin wanted peace and that few overt military moves were needed to remind him that he might blunder into a war if he pushed too hard and feared that militarization would increase the danger of war. Indeed his sense that the early Cold War was fairly safe helps explain his enthusiasm for covert action directed not only against East Europe, but the Soviet Union itself.<sup>10</sup> Granted that some of his papers and the “X” article could be read as endorsing a larger role for the military, Gaddis shows that the latter was not composed with great care and there is no reason to doubt the sincerity of his shock at how Walter Lippmann construed his meaning. The militarization of foreign policy was unnecessary and would decrease rather than increase American security by narrowing the scope for diplomacy.

Here is a third element of Kennan’s consistency. Ironically enough for someone who was the first director of the Policy Planning Staff, he always was skeptical about the utility of guidelines and stressed the role of contingency and the need for flexibility. His reading of history taught him that dangers and opportunities arose at unexpected times and places, and improvisation was necessary to both respond to them and take the initiative. The linked hostility to militarization and belief in the need for flexible diplomacy, combined with his commitment to a Europe that would stand on its own feet lay behind his support for forms of disengagement. When U.S. opted for a strong military NATO with a major West German contribution, Kennan felt, it reversed means and ends. As he explained, when he and like-minded colleagues argued for containment and bolstering Western Europe, it

did not occur to us that there was to be, in the institutional and particularly the military devices which we were then creating, anything so sacrosanct that these

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<sup>10</sup> Mitrovich, *Undermining the Kremlin*.

devices could not one day be modified or exchanged in favor of ones with a wider range of relevance and acceptance.<sup>11</sup>

A stress on building military capabilities and appearing tough was not only dangerous, but inhibited negotiations that could ameliorate the situation. “The ideal military posture is simply the enemy of every political détente or compromise,” he asserted.<sup>12</sup> Although not entirely correct (proponents of arms control would later successfully argue that security, if not advantage, might best be reached through negotiations), Kennan’s fire was directed at a politico-military posture that stressed the need for credibility, which its proponents believed could only be maintained by an unyielding posture incompatible with real diplomacy. And, like most professional diplomats, Kennan placed great faith in diplomacy. Not mindlessly, however. He argued against trying to open talks during the Chinese offensive in Korea on the grounds that the timing was wrong and an American offer would be taken as a sign of weakness. But, unlike many hard-liners, he did not think this usually would be the case. His sense that Soviet momentum had been stopped and that negotiations, although not guaranteeing a success, might work grew stronger after Stalin died. His successors, Kennan believed, lacked ideological zeal (in Khrushchev’s case I think this perception was mistaken) and the USSR could be treated as a normal if difficult state. He was then arguing, in effect, that the change in his position was not a product of inconsistency, but of the sort of changes within the Soviet Union that he had predicted all along. (He did not discuss, however, the possibility that successful negotiations and relaxation of tensions might reinvigorate or at least sustain Soviet ideology rather than further undermining it.)

Much of the disagreement about the wisdom of the policies that Kennan advocated turn on his views about the Soviet Union. Those who think the Long Telegram and the “X” article were misguided believe that Stalin’s foreign policy goals were reasonable and that a less militant response by the U.S. could have led, if not to full-scale cooperation, then at least to less rigid spheres of influence with lower fear of war and greater freedom in East Europe. Those who disparage Kennan’s dissents argue that he was right about Stalin, but wrong to believe that subsequent Soviet leaders were more moderate and less ideological. They see much greater consistency in the Soviet system and Soviet foreign policy. Reasonable bargains were few and far between, and détentes could not be long lasting. That Kennan knew more about Russia and the Soviet Union than almost all his critics is undisputable, but he never developed his arguments about how the USSR has changed in as much depth as he might have, perhaps because he thought it was so obvious or expected his authority to carry the required weight. Hard-line critics (and old friends) like Paul Nitze wondered how Kennan could be so sure he was right in the face of Soviet moves in the Third World and ever-increasing arms; as Gaddis explains “Kennan had always found it difficult to answer questions like these, because he relied so heavily on his intuitive sense that the Russians were not going to start a war” (637, emphasis in the original). Kennan, then,

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<sup>11</sup> “Disengagement Revisited,” p. 207.

<sup>12</sup> “Disengagement Revisited,” p. 199

thought he understood the psychology of the Soviet leaders, and Gaddis believes that he was often right. Perhaps, but I think he was less than fully sensitive to why others could read the situation differently.

Gaddis concludes that for all his flaws, Kennan was a great man. He generally avoids judgments as to when Kennan was right or wrong, or what determined the acuity of his perceptions and prescriptions. He does believe that Kennan was so blinded by Reagan's rhetoric and style that he failed to appreciate the extent to which the president shared his views on nuclear weapons and Soviet internal weakness, and while he notes how often Kennan was affected by emotion and flattery, he does not provide us with a scorecard. This may be just as well, since this is a crude way to look at the world, probably more appealing to political scientists than to historians. For Gaddis, Kennan's greatness resides in his elucidation of what indeed was a grand strategy (and Gaddis really likes grand strategies even when he does not completely agree with them), in his role as a prophet, and, less obviously, in his basing his strategy in part on his "faith in the United States" (295) despite his "detestation of the culture" that it developed and even exported to Europe (697). This faith, and the fact that American society was open and flexible enough to permit Kennan to gain positions of power due to his personal merit and to accommodate his multiple roles, justifies the subtitle of the book as "An American Life."

Gaddis leaves us a lot to argue about, but Kennan's life and Gaddis' account of it have earned our deep gratitude.



John Gaddis's impressive powers of historical analysis have been on full display from the publication of his groundbreaking first book, *The United States and the Origins of the Cold War, 1941–1947*, in 1972. Since then these powers have not dimmed and have been revealed especially in his terrific synthesis of American national security policy during the Cold War, *Strategies of Containment*, as well as in his brilliant international history of the first decades of the Cold War, *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History*, which drew so insightfully on newly available sources in various countries upon the end of the Cold War.

There could be no doubt that Gaddis would apply these powers of analysis in his study of the life of George F. Kennan, and so indeed he has. But he has done much more. The accomplished Cold War historian has proved himself a masterful biographer. Writing Cold War history and tracing the long life of a deeply complex man are quite different tasks. But Gaddis mastered the latter challenge in this remarkable book which so expertly reveals how Kennan navigated his way forward through virtually the whole of the twentieth century.

Having studied and tracked Kennan myself, at least to some extent, for over three decades, and also having known John Gaddis first as professional colleague and then as friend over the last quarter-century, I feel confident in saying that this wonderful biography benefited from its long gestation. Gaddis became a better biographer over the twenty-five year period of his association with George Kennan. He came to know his subject more truly as this extraordinary account of Kennan's life makes clear.

In my contribution to this roundtable I offer some further comments on aspects of the biography and on Gaddis's achievement as biographer, which may or may not interest the typical H-Diplo reader. Then I turn to offer some brief commentary in the area I know best, namely Kennan's contribution to the making of American foreign policy during his directorship of the policy planning staff and his role in the formulation of the containment strategy.

In writing of Kennan's two volume history of the early American response to the Bolshevik Revolution, Gaddis notes Kennan's empathy in his works of history and held that "one of the most striking features of *Russia Leaves the War* and the *Decision to Intervene* was his ability to put himself in the position of the people he wrote about. He took pains to see things from *their* point of view, without imposing his own or those of a different age. He listened, but rarely judged. He showed respect for the dead" (514). Gaddis demonstrates a similar empathy in this study and, even when questioning Kennan's decisions or criticizing his views, he treats him with enormous respect. He resists any temptation to use Kennan's life to serve either a cause or idea of his own. He doesn't impose himself on Kennan but carefully reveals his subject's complexities.

This "life" of Kennan is by Gaddis's own description a "selective life" (xi) but it is an astutely selective one which covers all the significant episodes in Kennan's impressive journey as

“diplomat, grand strategist, historian, memoirist, cultural critic, and antiwar activist” (ix) -- and more. The biography is divided into five parts—and in that it mirrors the Long Telegram. Each part flows beautifully, carefully unfolding Kennan’s personality as well as his accomplishments and challenges. Gaddis never seems to tire of Kennan, and he retains his deep respect and regard for him even as he records his subject’s endless anxieties and insecurities, his egocentric nature, his internal conflicts and notable self-pity. Such personal limitations and flaws might have overwhelmed a lesser biographer, but Gaddis both sees them and sees beyond them.

In understanding Kennan’s life, Gaddis’s dedication of the book to the memory of Annelise Sorensen Kennan is suggestive and perhaps revealing. On the dedication page, Gaddis holds that without Mrs. Kennan “it would not have been possible” (vii). To what, we might ask, does the “it” refer to here? Possibly Gaddis means simply his book, but given his deeply sympathetic portrayal of Annelise Kennan one suspects that he means much more. Gaddis surely appreciated all Mrs. Kennan did to assist him in his extensive research, but even more so he seems to have understood in a powerful way the resilience, the patience, and the practical good sense of Annelise Kennan, and how she had loved her husband and anchored him throughout their over seventy years together (425). Gaddis came to know well the crucial stabilizing influence she played in grounding the life of his subject and he rightly acknowledges that. He writes of Annelise Kennan that she missed little and understood much (598). His dedication, along with the beautifully perceptive portrait of Annelise Kennan, suggests that the same might be said of him.

Sometime in the mid-fifties Kennan, in a rather typical lamentation mode, confided to his diary his loathing for “this thin, tight, lonely American life.” He morosely described himself as “utterly without relationship to this country and this age” (514). In short, he evidenced little affection for his own nation and people. This was hardly the first time and would not be the last. In fact, Kennan occasionally thought of himself as a virtual exile within his own country. Yet, John Gaddis sub-titled his study “An American Life.” Is there some irony here? Not really, it would seem. Gaddis notes Kennan’s inability to view his country dispassionately at times, but he also suggests that Kennan’s “frustrations about America were really frustrations about himself” (539). Kennan lived outside the United States as a diplomat and occasionally as a scholar for a considerable number of years, but he never made good on his occasional threats to leave America. Gaddis suggests that he really couldn’t – his visceral love-hate relationship with his own country was simply part of him. Thus he was a constant critic of the United States and sought in the manner of some Old Testament prophet to guide it. Fortunately, the impact of his domestic criticisms was negligible, however, as his views were often deeply flawed and reflected an elitist contempt for the workings of American democratic institutions. Gaddis observes that “one of the most persistent paradoxes” of Kennan’s career was “that he understood the Soviet Union far better than he did the United States” (117).

Gaddis’s rich understanding of Kennan is in evidence in many elements of this substantial tome. He grasps the enduring and deep impact of the death of Kennan’s mother when he was just an infant. He chronicles Kennan’s religious and moral journey with true comprehension, noting Kennan’s internal struggles to confront his own sinfulness, his

recognition of Christ as the great moral exemplar, and his dependence on God's grace amidst in Kennan's words "the whole monstrous fragility and tragedy of our lives" (p. 612). He details Kennan's capacity for friendship and his genuine courage in standing up for his friends as he surely did in supporting Robert Oppenheimer and John Paton Davies against the criticisms and charges mounted against them. And, he perceptively identifies Kennan's "emotional fragility" as a source of the "professional volatility" that afflicted him throughout his career (569).

In making his case for Kennan's "greatness" (693) Gaddis points to his important contributions as grand strategist, as historian, as writer, as philosopher, and finally, taking a lead from Kennan himself, as teacher. Surprisingly, some reviewers have questioned Gaddis's elevation of Kennan as a *teacher* above his other accomplishments and have noted that he was a teacher who never had students in the normal way. Gaddis's view is surely the more persuasive and it comes from someone who is himself a wonderful teacher in the more conventional sense. Gaddis observes in his acknowledgments that "teaching, I have discovered long ago, is how I learn" and he goes on to thank his students, especially those in his Yale biography seminar, whom he deems his "collaborators, whether they realize it or not" on this project (700). Yet, this accomplished teacher of both graduate and undergraduate students, grasped fully how Kennan's extensive efforts as foreign service officer, writer and lecturer combined into a sustained career as a teacher in which he provided lessons for students far beyond the confines of any single seminar or classroom. His lessons were on "understanding Russia; on shaping a strategy for dealing with that country; on the danger that in pursuing that strategy too aggressively, the United States could endanger itself; on what the past suggested about societies that had done just this; on how to study history; on how to write; and on how to live" (697). This was some teaching career.

Unfortunately for Kennan his 'lessons,' although invariably interesting and presented eloquently, were not always persuasive to his various audiences. This certainly proved the case with Dean Acheson, whom Kennan sought to instruct on the matter of disengagement from Germany and the need for a European settlement in 1949 and in the decade thereafter. Gaddis's fair-minded handling of Acheson and of the Acheson-Kennan relationship speaks to the high quality of this study. Acheson's renowned arrogance, his caustic wit and his (at times) overbearing manner rarely endear him to scholarly observers even when they respect him. But for the most part Gaddis takes no easy cheap shots at Acheson in order to elevate Kennan. Rather his discussion of their differing approaches provides insight regarding both men. Gaddis's Acheson is the practical Aristotelian who will not let the perfect be the enemy of the good. He will struggle ahead and adjust his goals and tactics so as to obtain something. Kennan is much more wedded to ideal Platonic forms and to fashioning schemas that prove difficult to implement in practice. In this biography of Kennan, Acheson's realism, responsibility, and good judgment are well-displayed and rightly so.

Reflecting on the Acheson-Kennan relationship brings us to Kennan's contribution to the making of American foreign policy and how Gaddis portrays him as the key author of the containment strategy which provided for the postwar world "a path between the

appeasement that had failed to prevent World War II and the alternative of a third world war, the devastation from which would have been unimaginable” (694). In this broad sense, Gaddis endorses the view of Henry Kissinger that Kennan “came as close to authoring the diplomatic doctrine of his era as any diplomat in our history” (693). Here, however, I want to express some reservations.

Gaddis rightly attends to Kennan’s important role in calling forth the need for a new American approach to the Soviet Union in the Long Telegram and elsewhere, but he overstates Kennan role in fashioning that response. He succumbs, at least partly, to the temptation to anoint George Kennan as the essential delineator of the West’s policy of containing the Soviet Union. Of course, being so able a historian, he readily concedes that others determined “what ‘containment’ required,” (695) but there is still some over-claiming here with regard to Kennan’s grand strategic contribution. Kennan’s authorship of the “Sources of Soviet Conduct” in 1947 introduced the broader public to the word and the very general concept of containment, but, as I have argued elsewhere, it must be understood that Kennan never obtained some equivalent of copyright over the doctrine or strategy of containment. He provided a disposition more than a plan of action, and he offered no detailed prescription for policy in the “X” article. Any characterization of him as a Moses-type figure descending to give the law of containment over to a disoriented group of American policymakers should be rejected. Others played crucial roles in defining and en fleshing containment. Indeed, the containment doctrine gained form and meaning *from* the policies that emerged rather than dictating the *nature* of those policies.

Kennan operated at the vortex of the policy-making process from 1947 to 1950 and he contributed significantly to some of the most important policy initiatives such as the Marshall Plan and American policy towards both China and Japan in this crucial period. But he lost out on others, as Gaddis records so well. He dissented from some of the major policies such as NATO and the incorporation of West Germany into the western alliance that gave containment meaning in practice. Kennan argued for a more political-economic and less military version of containment, but ultimately Truman and Acheson rejected his counsel. He failed to persuade his superiors and his colleagues that the Soviet threat was limited and essentially political. He based his analysis on an assessment of Soviet intentions rather than capabilities. His fellow policymakers found this assessment unpersuasive, especially after the Soviets exploded an atomic weapon. The adoption of NSC 68 during the Korean War formalized the rejection of the strategic vision Kennan proffered.

Any accurate assessment of George Kennan must refrain from casting him in the role of the dominant architect whose planning provided instructions for building the essential structures of foreign policy for a generation after World War II. Gaddis understands this, but I have been struck by the number of reviewers of his book who simplistically brand Kennan as the great architect who set the whole direction for post-war foreign policy. I have argued instead that Kennan is better understood as one of a number of remarkable on-site builders—such as General George Marshall, Acheson, John Hickerson, and Paul Nitze—who contributed in important ways to the eventual structure that emerged in these crucial postwar years. These builders operated without fixed and agreed upon

architectural plans. They debated hard and then determined the shape of the structure as they went along. There was an *ad hoc* quality to much of their work. This reality is quite apparent in the Gaddis biography as Kennan's policy-making successes and failures are ably explored, but the point might have received further emphasis. So might the role of the West Europeans have been highlighted further in the making of postwar strategy. Assuredly, British Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin hardly needed George Kennan's strategic guidance to recognize that American economic and military support was necessary to counter the intrusion of Soviet power into the very heart of Europe.

One could go on at much greater length about many aspects of the book for it provokes and stimulates throughout, but mention must be made of Gaddis's final chapters. They are especially rewarding and cast real light on the end of the Cold War. They portray in many ways a man who provided a certain comfort for the Soviet Union in the supposed interest of stability in U.S.-Soviet relations. Kennan is presented as a passionate critic of the supposedly bellicose Reagan administration, but he is rightly chided by his biographer for his loathing of the one-time Hollywood actor who succeeded in removing intermediate range nuclear missiles from Europe (670). Further, Gaddis notes Kennan's criticisms of moral giants like Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn and Andrei Sakharov in the 1970s for their daring to protest the brutally thuggish Soviet regime (622) even while he branded Leonid Brezhnev "a man of peace" (637). Kennan offered no encouragement to the Solidarity movement in Poland and to broader human rights efforts in Eastern Europe in the 1980s. Nor did he favor the efforts of the Reagan administration to support and sustain them. Instead, he expressed concern as to how Soviet leaders would react to such support. He spoke out against Reagan's call for Gorbachev to "tear down this wall" and ultimately he opposed any moves for German reunification. He seemed almost resentful that the Cold War ended on terms that so favored the West. This was hardly an impressive performance whatever the accolades it gained for him in intellectual circles instinctively and viscerally critical of Reagan and of American foreign policy in general.

In May 1953 Kennan wrote an essay for *The Atlantic Monthly* entitled "Training for Statesmanship." Perhaps there was a little irony in his taking up this subject given his recent failure as ambassador to Moscow, but Kennan held that "the only useful preparation for diplomacy came from history, as well as 'from the more subtle and revealing expressions of man's nature' found in art and literature"(489). In some important ways John Gaddis and his stalwart collaborators Paul Kennedy and Charles Hill have applied this insight in their wonderfully conceived and executed grand strategy seminar at Yale. But those who cannot benefit directly from their teaching ministrations in New Haven will find in *George F. Kennan: An American Life* a valuable alternative. It is an excellent point of departure for beneficial reflection not only on Kennan's fascinating journey through the last century but also on human nature and on how the United States should and should not exercise its power in the world. It is a sublime exercise in teaching.

Author's Response by John Lewis Gaddis, Yale University

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I'd first like to thank Tom Maddux for organizing this electronic discussion, as well as Frank Costigliola, David Engerman, Hope Harrison, Walter Hixson, Robert Jervis, and Wilson D. Miscamble, C.S.C., for contributing to it. Several of them found ways to remark, however politely, upon the length of the book on which they were commenting. If it's any consolation, I can assure them that it could easily have been twice as long, given the richness of the sources available. But fewer people, I suspect, would have read it.

Some biographers must make the most of very little. Stacey Schiff, for example, has written a deservedly prize-winning life of Cleopatra, who left behind only a single safely attributable sentence.<sup>1</sup> That was not my problem with George F. Kennan. Other biographers, blessed with voluminous sources, seem to stagger under their weight. I've never been sure that Lyndon Johnson's kidney stone needed a whole chapter in the second volume of Robert Caro's biography, painful though it no doubt was to the candidate during the 1948 Texas Democratic primary.<sup>2</sup> Kennan had a kidney stone too, but it gets only two or three sentences in my book.

In writing it, I tried to steer a course between the extremes represented by Schiff and Caro. Biographies should recount a life, but that's not the same as cataloging everything that happened within one. They should suggest character, but not belabor it. They should reveal contradictions, but not force resolutions. They need not, like loyal dogs, follow their masters everywhere.

Achieving these balances comes from learning *not* to use most of the notes you took. You look for the episodes, anecdotes, and quotations – even the legends, in Cleopatra's case – that *exemplify* your subject: these can range from the cosmic to the trivial, but they must be evocative. You're aware, but you don't say, that you have another ten examples for every one you use. My own attrition rate for notes was about 95%, and for quotes from the interviews I did, only slightly less. Biographies, in this sense, are like icebergs: only their authors can really know what lies beneath the surface.

No two biographers, even of the same individual, will ever agree on what to include, what to leave out, and even where to put things. Costigliola chides me for failing to give sufficient attention to Kennan's warning, while testifying before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in 1966, against going abroad, in John Quincy Adams's words, in search of "monsters to destroy." But I do discuss that quotation when Kennan first used it, which as far as I can determine was in November, 1949. I noted at that point (p. 366) that it would become Kennan's favorite: he used it so many times in subsequent writings and speeches that I could feel it coming. I didn't have to look. How many of these instances,

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<sup>1</sup> Stacy Schiff, *Cleopatra: A Life* (Little, Brown and Co, 2010)

<sup>2</sup> Robert A. Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson: Means of Ascent* (Knopf, 1990), chapter 10.

however, did I need to cite? Statesmen, when speaking to different audiences, can usually get away with recycling. Biographers, who write for a single audience, can't – at least not without risking a shout-out: "Enough already, we get it!"

Avoiding repetition is simple, though, compared to another standard for exclusion, which is that of *significance*. Hixson questions my devoting almost 500 pages to the first half of Kennan's life, and only 200 to the rest. I could indeed have done more with the post-State Department years: there's plenty of material in the Kennan papers. But would my readers, most of whom remember Kennan as the architect of containment in the 1940s, have been equally transfixed by his post-1953 career as a historian, public intellectual, and antinuclear activist? Or by what his diary reveals, in gloomier detail as he got older, about his health? Or by what I have called Kennan's "repetitive rants" (a phrase to which Hixson objects) about America?

I thought not, and proportioned the book accordingly. Yet even I said enough about Kennan's "rants" to make Engerman wonder whether my sub-title, *An American Life*, might be an "inadvertent irony." You'd have to be pretty careless to work on a book for thirty years and then lose track of the sub-title. Miscamble has it right when he reminds us that Old Testament prophets could simultaneously love and hate their country. Kennan loved his but held it to impossibly high standards; he then hated it for falling short. He did much the same with himself.

In which connection, I defer to Miscamble's judgment when he says that Kennan was no Moses: he was not the sole architect of containment, and if my book conveyed that impression, it fell prey to the biographer's occupational hazard of inflating the subject's importance. But as Jervis points out in his long and careful analysis of the book, the quality of Kennan's writing and the eloquence of his speaking did make him containment's most *charismatic* architect. So maybe the appropriate analogy, suitable for Kennan in more ways than one, might be not Moses, but rather David.

Harrison raises a different issue, which is that I don't always trace Kennan's interior thoughts at significant moments in his life. The problem here is that Kennan kept his diaries irregularly. With a couple of exceptions (his last days on the Policy Planning Staff in late 1949, his involvement in the Korean crisis in the summer of 1950), they tend to fade out when you would most like to have details. Either Kennan was too busy to keep a diary during these periods, or, when in the Soviet Union, he thought it too risky. I've not tried to paper over those gaps with "must have" claims – Kennan "must have" felt this or that – because I've sought throughout the book to say only what I know, without going beyond that. That does leave Kennan's "interiority" inconsistently rendered.

Biographies reflect, inescapably, biographers. None of us are blank slates, waiting patiently for our subjects to impress themselves upon our empty minds. As several of the commentators pointed out, I had my own views on Cold War history and on contemporary affairs when I began this project in 1981, and I've continued to have them since. I made no effort to conceal these from Kennan, and he made his disagreements with some of them

clear to me. It would never have occurred to either of us to expect compatibility in all respects. Far from it: we would both have thought this dull.

It therefore does not surprise me that the elderly Kennan on one occasion, quoted by Costigliola and cited by Hixson, wondered whether I had adequately understood his views on the nuclear arms race. Kennan frequently brought up such questions with me, in person and in our correspondence. I always replied that if, at any point, he had lost confidence and wished to authorize another biographer, I would immediately step aside. That never happened: we simply agreed, with mutual respect, to disagree.

Costigliola is incorrect, then, in suggesting that my “differences” with Kennan delayed the biography. What did was his own longevity, for we had agreed that the book would not appear until after his death, and that he would never read it. He did several times say to me, in his later years, that I might as well start writing, “because by the time you finish, I’ll be senile and not able to understand it anyway.” I worried, though, that to draft parts of the biography and then set them aside would only mean having to re-draft them later. So I didn’t begin writing until the summer of 2007, and I finished four years later.

The point of posthumous publication was for me to have the freedom to say what I thought: Kennan and I never, at any point, disagreed about that. Did he, as Engerman has suggested, nonetheless attempt to “control the narrative”? Of course he did. Anyone who talks with a biographer – or, for that matter, leaves papers to an archive, as Kennan did earlier than most of his contemporaries – is seeking to shape a legacy. Cleopatra, Schiff shows, certainly sought to shape hers, if more through performance than through archives. Only people who don’t expect a place in history – for example, the Maine midwife Martha Ballard, whose account book forms the basis for Laurel Thatcher Ulrich’s remarkable biography – don’t in one way or another try to control narratives.<sup>3</sup> The point about Kennan was that he was free to try, but that I was free, if I so chose, not to listen.

The most useful insight for me, in all of these comments, is Miscamble’s suggestion that Kennan was Plato, more preoccupied with ideal forms than with gritty reality, while Acheson was Aristotle, focusing on the world as it was, adapting as necessary to get things done. This parallels Isaiah Berlin’s characterization of Plato as a hedgehog (knowing one big thing) and of Aristotle as a fox (knowing many things). The more I teach, the more I’m convinced that the critical choice for young people is not which of these beasts to be throughout their lives, but which to be when at various points in life. So I thank Father Bill for guiding me toward what will probably be my next book, just as he has guided me in much else, by no means all of it having to do with George F. Kennan.

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<sup>3</sup> Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *A Midwife’s Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, Based on Her Diary, 1785-1812*, (Vintage, 1991).



A Response by Marc Trachtenberg, University of California, Los Angeles

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I'd like to react a little to Bob Jervis's contribution to the H-Diplo roundtable that just came out on John Gaddis's biography of George Kennan. In particular, I'd like to deal with the question of whether Kennan was really important enough to deserve all the attention that has been showered on him over the years.

Kennan's contribution, Jervis writes (summarizing one of the points Gaddis makes when dealing with this issue) "was not to alert Washington to the danger of Soviet expansionism. This was already clear to many in Washington and would soon enough have been apparent thanks to Stalin's behavior. Rather, the contribution was in showing that there was a way out, a path between appeasement and inevitable war."

My own view is a little different. I don't think Kennan should be given particular credit for showing that there was "a path between appeasement and inevitable war." The reason is that I don't think people like Secretary of State James Byrnes, the real maker of American policy in the immediate post-World War II period, ever believed that those were the only two possibilities. He and other key U.S. policy makers had little trouble grasping the point from the very start (and especially at Potsdam) that a division of Europe in general, and of Germany in particular, was a perfectly viable solution to the problem of how the two sides could coexist without a war.

Was it the case, however, that only Kennan (in the X-article) could give a convincing rationale for the containment policy? The X-article, to my mind, was scarcely convincing on its own terms. It put forth an internalist interpretation of Soviet foreign policy, which was very odd for someone like Kennan whose whole approach to foreign policy was supposed to be grounded in realist principles. I'm still struck when I reread that piece by the cavalier way in which Kennan dismissed the importance of real foreign threats in the making of Soviet policy--by his claim that the emphasis the Soviets placed on a "basic antagonism between the capitalist and Socialist worlds" was "not founded in reality." "The real facts concerning it," he went on, "have been confused by the existence abroad of genuine resentment provoked by Soviet philosophy and tactics and occasionally by the existence of great centers of military power, notably the Nazi regime in Germany and the Japanese government of the late 1930s, which did indeed have aggressive designs on the Soviet Union." But there was "ample evidence," he thought, that that sort of thing did not count for much, and that the foreign threat was artificially trumped up for domestic political purposes. I remember my jaw dropping when I read this. "Occasionally"? These were rare occurrences, of no great political importance? Given what the Soviets had just suffered, this was an extraordinary line to take in 1947, politically blind and morally insensitive, and I wonder how many serious people were really persuaded by this line of argument.

But maybe we pay too much attention to the X-article and containment when we think about Kennan. Looking at his career as a whole, there's a lot about him I find appealing. I personally like Kennan's 1950 book *American Diplomacy*, especially the lecture about Wilson and World War I, a lot more than Jervis does. It certainly made an enormous

impression on me when I first read it, and played a key role in shaping my own approach to foreign policy. Jervis calls it “an inferior work of history,” but I think it should not be viewed as a work of history at all, but rather as a work that used history as a vehicle for presenting ideas about policy. I also like the fact that Kennan was inclined -- although perhaps a little too inclined, as Jervis suggests—to lean against the prevailing wisdom. I think Jervis was right to note that much the same could be said of Bernard Brodie. But to my mind Brodie was more honest, or perhaps just more penetrating, than Kennan. I never knew Brodie personally, but I have warm feelings when I think about him, whereas Kennan as a person leaves me cold.

Let me give an example of where Kennan fell short, when measured against the Brodie standard. As Jervis points out, Kennan felt that Europe could not be kept in a “subordinate position forever”—that it was “unthinkable that its destiny could be guided by outsiders” like America and Russia. But I don’t think Kennan ever understood that Eisenhower’s goal was to provide for a Europe that could stand on its own, or that the experience of the 1950s showed that that kind of approach was simply not viable--that there was no purely European solution to the European security problem. There had to be a counterweight to Soviet power in Europe; if America was not to provide it, then you would need a strong Europe, and a strong Europe implied a strong, i.e., nuclearized, Germany. But that would in turn create problems of its own, problems probably greater than those associated with the divided Europe of the Cold War period, and practically no one outside of Germany wanted it--not the Russians, not Germany’s West European neighbors, not even the Americans by and large. The Eisenhower policy had led straight to the Berlin crisis, and the Kennedy people, whom Kennan admired, recognized that a free-standing Europe was not in the cards, and built a new, and ultimately viable, policy on the basis of that assumption. (These matters are very fresh in my mind, since I dealt with them in a piece on de Gaulle that just came out in the *Journal of Cold War History*.) And yet Kennan simply did not see what was going on around him. He did not even understand what Byrnes was doing in late 1945, even though he was in the Moscow embassy at the time and Harriman, the ambassador there, was deeply involved in the implementation of the Byrnes policy.

Incidentally, it is surprising, given how much was on the public record at the time, that people--not even people in the Kennedy administration—simply did not understand the Eisenhower policy. I remember pointing this out once in a conference in 1992 on the Skybolt affair, and McGeorge Bundy, who was there, kind of smiled and said, tongue-in-cheek, that there was a certain tendency in the Kennedy period “to think that history began in January 1961.”

In any event, I think Kennan was very different from Brodie. Brodie’s inconsistencies, such as they were, were rooted in his ability to see both sides of an issue, and his dislike of dogmatism. Kennan’s tone is quite different, at times verging on whining.

One last point about Kennan, and that has to do with why the Kennan myth--how he was the architect of containment and so on—is so persistent. I think a lot of it has to do with the fact that when an interpretation of the recent past first takes shape, people seize on what’s most visible. The X-article got a lot of attention at the time; it was thus natural to

take it, along with other prominent events like the Truman Doctrine speech, as one of the building blocks of a consensus interpretation when people first felt the need for something of that sort. And once that interpretation takes shape, it is often—far too frequently in my view—more or less impervious to the arguments historians make based on new evidence.

*Marc Trachtenberg*

Political Science Department

University of California, Los Angeles

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