

John Kadar¹ - Eric Engle²:

Truman and the Rise of the Cold War

Lessons from the past for the present

Introduction

The period referred to as the Cold War was inaugurated after the death of Franklin Delano Roosevelt (hereafter FDR) and the end of World War II (hereafter, WW2). The events of the past can reveal competing and complimenting patterns and meanings and the many historical narratives in print are proof of this variety. Regarding the wartime collaboration between the US and USSR, most historians are in agreement. During World War II, Franklin Roosevelt and Stalin established an effective working relationship that seemed to bode well for the prospect of a stable future, devoid of major confrontations. The agreements proceeded from the following exchange of promises:

- 1) The US would provide loans to the USSR which the latter would use to purchase American war materiel required to keep Soviet armies in the field on the Eastern Front. The extension of the "lend lease" loans for post-war reconstruction was implicit in this arrangement.
- The US and UK would open up a second front in Europe in order to relieve the pressure on Soviet armies and in order to hasten the defeat of Hitler, the top strategic priority of the Allies ("Hitler first", i.e. targeting Nazi Germany prior to Imperial Japan).
- 3) The division of the spoils would be in accordance with efforts and results in the field and not necessarily on the basis of pre-war power division. In practical terms, this reduced Eastern Europe to a Soviet sphere of influence. It also reduced Western Europe to a US appendage.
- 4) Germany would not be allowed to rebuild itself into a viable industrial and military power capable of making war against Soviet Russia. Germany would be required to pay reparations to indemnify the USSR's vast wartime losses.

It cannot be denied that the Soviet armies were doing the far greater share of the fighting and dying in the European theater of war between 1941 and 1943. Hitler had directed his generals to conquer the USSR after having overrun most of Europe. It is also an accepted fact that the war in the East had provided the US and UK with a much needed respite which allowed them to

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recover from prior defeats and to mobilize for the final push to dislodge Hitler from occupied Europe. Only when the Soviet armies succeeded in turning back the Wehrmacht from the gates of Moscow and Stalingrad was hope revived for defeating Hitler's armies in Europe. Only while Hitler's armies were tied down and suffering reversals of fortune on the battlefields of the Eastern Front could the US and UK hope to successfully carry out a cross-channel assault on the European mainland occupied by Nazi Germany. President Roosevelt was mindful of America's debt to Stalin and intended to uphold his end of the bargain, though the same cannot be said of Churchill. Churchill favored putting off the Normandy invasion, initially scheduled for 1943, to 1944 despite Stalin's pleadings. Churchill also initiated covert operations in the Balkans to limit Soviet influence while also meddling in Poland by accepting an anti-Soviet government-in-exile in London, even though a pro-Soviet government had been set up in liberated Lublin, Poland. Additionally, Churchill also favored an exclusive Anglo-American alliance in determining the division of the spoils of war and schemed against Stalin. President Roosevelt had rejected these British machinations in order to avoid giving the impression that the US and Great Britain were planning to gang up on the USSR after the conclusion of the war. President Roosevelt also prevented efforts by disaffected Foreign Service officials to sabotage lend-lease deliveries to the USSR. Stalin's spies in the US likely confirmed President Roosevelt's sincerity to maintain friendly relations with the USSR during and after the war. What happened after President Roosevelt died suddenly in 1945 to transform the friendly relations between the US and USSR and move them into a high state of tension, insecurity and war preparation known as the Cold War has been the subject of many treatises.

Though a definitive answer waits to be written, some historians have offered updated interpretations based on new information released from the Soviet archives. One also has a right to expect more realistic results from historians after the easing of passions which biased perspectives and judgments along nationalistic lines for many years, not to mention the release of archive documents which had been held secret. The purpose of this paper is to evaluate five historical narratives which appeared in print between 1996 and 2007:

- 1) John Lewis Gaddis, *The Cold War: A New History*³.
- 2) Michael J. Hogan, *A Cross of Iron: Harry S. Truman and the Origins of the National Security State, 1945-1954*.⁴
- 3) Melvyn P. Leffler, *For the Soul of Mankind*.⁵
- 4) Arnold A. Offner, *Another Such Victory: President Truman and the Cold War, 1945-1953*.⁶
- 5) Vladislav Zubok, Konstantin Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War*.⁷

Specifically, this paper focuses on the answers they provide to the question how the Cold War arose from a previous period of relations characterized by collaboration based on mutual trust and good faith. The first task is to describe how each of the five contemporary historians have come to make their conclusions regarding the origins of the Cold War, specifically to answer what factors led FDR's successor, Harry Truman, to adopt policies which contravened the former agreements with Stalin. This section merely summarizes their conclusions or inferences

³ John Lewis Gaddis, *The Cold War: A New History*. New York: Penguin (2007).

⁴ Michael J. Hogan, *A Cross of Iron: Harry S. Truman and the Origins of the National Security State, 1945-1954*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1998).

⁵ Melvyn P. Leffler, *For the Soul of Mankind*. New York: Hill and Wang (2007).

⁶ Arnold A. Offner, *Another Such Victory: President Truman and the Cold War, 1945-1953*. Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press (2002).

⁷ Vladislav Zubok, Konstantin Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War*. Cambridge MA: Harvard Univ. Press (1996).

form the facts they have selected as evidence. Then, an analysis is offered for how their conclusions may have strayed too far from the known facts or how the subtraction or addition of other facts can lead to different conclusions. Finally an effort will be made to suggest how a collation of the evidence from the several narratives could better answer the questions which prompted their individual approaches. By "better" is meant more truthfully, allowing that the whole truth of a past under investigation may never be discovered and also that such truths as can be discovered are merely provisional.

John Lewis Gaddis

According to Professor Gaddis, the war-time agreements between Stalin and FDR regarding Soviet control of Eastern Europe and concessions in the Mediterranean and Asia should have raised sceptical eyebrows in Washington since Stalin was intent on expanding beyond the proposed territorial gains, relying on FDR's trusting nature and idealism to acquire concessions not warranted by the USSR's actual power relations with the USA during and immediately after the war. Gaddis suggests that Stalin's ulterior motives were shaped not only or even mainly by security concerns but by a Marxist-Leninist dogma which pitted capitalist countries against socialist ones as inexorable adversaries. Stalin, according to Gaddis, had a clear "grand vision" of the possibilities for collaboration and peace after WW2 and it was slim to non-existent.⁸ According to Gaddis, Stalin's wartime alliance was a tactical maneuver designed for appearance and expediency.⁹ Once the danger passed, Stalin intended to pursue a policy of expansion and world revolution.¹⁰ Truman and his advisers, unlike FDR and his assistants, were realists. They recognized Stalin for what he really was -- a dictator with a blood-lust for dealing with opponents and a plan for communizing the world under the hegemony of the Soviet Union. Hence, Truman, the hard boiled politico, was determined to put Stalin in his place, and that place was not that of a "junior partner". The actual power relations between the US and USSR had never supported such an elevated status for the latter and with possession of atomic bombs the power of the US had far surpassed that of the USSR, necessitating a break from the war-time agreements which Stalin never took seriously in the first place.¹¹ The only question that remained was whether to demote Stalin to a probationary status or to designate him as an outright enemy. That question was mute in the mind of Professor Gaddis as well as in the minds of Truman and his advisors since presumably they had seen the real Stalin behind the collaborative facade. According to Professor Gaddis, Truman began to question FDR's commitments to Stalin even before he was certain about the efficacy of the atomic bomb.¹² But, after Nagasaki and Hiroshima had been obliterated, Truman and his advisers sought to force the scheming Stalin to accept less than was promised by FDR. Due to his perceived power superiority, Truman maneuvered Stalin into a take-it-or-leave-it position in which the only option was acceptance of a reduction of the division of the wartime spoils.¹³

If FDR had accepted Stalin as a "junior partner" during the war, Truman, according to Gaddis, saw no need to divide the spoils of victory on the basis of FDR's mistaken assessment of the

⁸ John Lewis Gaddis, *The Cold War: A New History*. p. 14 (hereafter Gaddis).

⁹ Gaddis, p. 14.

¹⁰ Gaddis, p. 14.

¹¹ Gaddis, p. 26.

¹² Gaddis, p. 26.

¹³ Gaddis, p. 28.

power ratio between the US and USSR. Truman believed that possession of the atomic bomb should produce a conciliatory response from Stalin.¹⁴ If Stalin insisted on getting what he had been originally promised then he was overreaching and behaving irrationally -- or bluffing. Either way, he had to be put in his place. Whereas, FDR had acclaimed the sacrifices and heroism of the Soviet people, Truman by 1946 began to denounce Stalin as a malevolent force on the world stage who was bent on undermining world peace to suit his predisposition for domination through world revolution. Truman resigned himself to this course of action, according to Gaddis, even before Forrestal and Kennan and Clifford and Elsey had provided him with the ideological rhetoric to attack Stalin.¹⁵ In professor Gaddis's narrative of the origins of the Cold War, the dangers result from an ideology and power-addicted Stalin who also had a tendency to overreach beyond his capabilities, thereby posing a threat to the US and the world.

Does Professor Gaddis present persuasive evidence for his conclusions about Stalin and the USSR? Actually, no. In fact, he presents no empirical evidence for his conclusions. It has already been established that Stalin, unlike Trotsky, was willing to abandon the call for world revolution for the sake of building socialism in one country, the Soviet Union. But, apparently, Professor Gaddis is ignorant of that fact -- or purposely ignores it. Stalin had also read and quoted favorably Marx and Engel's conclusion that America and Britain might forgo a proletarian revolution as a result of successful labor reforms. Furthermore, Gaddis's argument that Stalin was prone to overreaching because his assessment of actual power relations between the US and USSR was distorted by either wishful thinking or ideology is simply silly. Stalin seems to have understood that the USSR was not an equal in power with the US. In fact, he grasped the significance of America's industrial and military power relative to the exhausted state of Soviet Russia's physical and human assets. America's industrial infrastructure was intact and developing while its manpower losses were, in comparison with the tens of millions of dead Soviets, negligible. But it is also clear that Stalin also understood that the Soviet victory on the Eastern Front was indispensable to the defeat of Hitler in Europe. The USSR could thus expect the US and Britain to not only seal the victory over Hitlerian fascism but, given the disproportionate Soviet contribution to that victory, to propose post-war concessions either in terms of territory, development aid, or both. The concessions Stalin asked for were proportional, reasonable and are no example of an overplayed hand. A Soviet sphere of influence in Eastern Europe was justified if only as a security buffer to any potential future invasion of the USSR. Moreover, almost all the occupied Eastern European countries (Rumania, Bulgaria, Hungary, the Baltic states) were, to varying degrees and for various reasons, allies of Hitler. Basing and transit rights in the Turkish Straights and northern Iran were small matters in comparison to the Soviet losses and decisive victory over fascism at Stalingrad. These basing and transit rights did not necessarily imply an expansionist aim. Further, in terms of military power, these basing and transit rights were insignificant in the face of overwhelming allied naval and atomic power -- after all, did not the US and Britain exclusively control both the Atlantic and Pacific oceans? Stalin's request for small territorial concessions in China and some minor role in the occupation of Japan were not unreasonable in view of the fact that Stalin was requested to send a major force to fight the Japanese in Manchuria -- a request he incidentally honored. Stalin's request to keep Germany from ever again threatening the USSR was a no-brainer because a militantly powerful Germany would also threaten Western Europe, a major trading region for the US. The industrial machinery Stalin extracted from occupied Eastern Germany as war reparations were justifiable given the unilateral Nazi aggression against Russia. Spoliation of the defeated was not in 1945 illegal under

¹⁴ Gaddis, p. 26.

¹⁵ Gaddis, p. 28.

international law. All in all, the concessions granted to Stalin were less than one might have reasonably expected in proportion to the Soviet contribution to the defeat of fascism or of those due a "junior partner". To conclude otherwise from the evidence warrants that we ask ourselves about Professor Gaddis's ability to evaluate questions of evidence.

With the possible exception of the Berlin blockade Stalin did not overreach - and he quickly recovered his sanity and backed off from a possible nuclear confrontation over Berlin. Stalin did consolidate his power in Eastern Europe -- in the face of US pressure applied through NATO, the Marshall Plan and the Truman Doctrine but he did so on a defensive basis after the US and Great Britain had commenced in no uncertain terms, to stir up opposition in the Soviet's Eastern European sphere of influence.

Vladislav Zubok and Constantine Pleshakov

Zubok and Pleshakov make an unfortunate contribution to the case, blaming Stalin for setting off the Cold War. For them, Stalin was a psychopath, a monster whose murderous ways would have been projected onto the world stage unless he was restrained by Truman.¹⁶ They make vague references to Stalin's criminality and blood-letting in repressing real or imagined internal dissidents, eliminating opponents inside the Party, setting up brutal police states in Eastern Europe. Certainly, Stalin was brutal -- but no more so than friends and opponents around him. Also, it has been shown that Stalin loathed most of the communist leaders in the satellite countries and repeatedly requested them to soften their repressive tactics, which Stalin believed would undermine the legitimacy of their regimes. Stalin has been the poster-child for evil for those who, like Professor Gaddis, want to deflect scrutiny from US conduct in the Cold War and its subsequent efforts to eliminate the USSR as its rival. Zubok and Pleshakov's entry into the fray as supporters of a Gaddis style narrative are compromised by their finding that Stalin entertained no master plan for expansion beyond the ambition to "merely" hold together the territories liberated by the USSR from fascism, territories which had often been part of Tsarist Russia or traditionally within the sphere of interests of great (imperial) Russia. Stalin wanted to control these regions if only in order to have a strategic buffer in the West to thwart any future fascist invasion of the USSR.¹⁷ If there was no master plan for Soviet global conquest/liberation then the door is opened for a more impartial, if not charitable, accounting of the facts.

Arnold Offner and Mehryn Leffler

Like a Gaddis, Professor Offner concludes that the changed ratio of power between the US and the USSR after the US came to possess atomic bombs justified Truman downsizing the spoils of war promised by President Roosevelt to Stalin - such is the routine practice in statecraft when a promise made under one set of circumstances is abrogated because changes allow for better terms. In this spirit, Truman's Secretary of State, James Byrnes, pushed his counterpart, V.I. Molotov, to give up on most territorial gains in China and Japan as well as in Turkey and Iran. At the 1945 Moscow Foreign Minister's Conference, Truman and Byrnes had not yet decided to pressure Stalin and Molotov to loosen their control in Eastern Europe but they were adamant in withdrawing other concessions previously offered or suggested by President Roosevelt. It seems,

¹⁶ Vladislav Zubok, Konstantin Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War*. p. 11 (hereafter Zubok).

¹⁷ Zubok, pp. 6-7.

according to Offner, that Stalin, the astute power politician, understood that the atomic bomb had given the Americans extra leverage in getting their way in Moscow (1945) and would continue to do so as long as that asymmetric power advantage held. Thus, Stalin seems to have reluctantly accepted the changed terms Byrnes put on the table. That Stalin did so without too much alarm proves that Stalin was a hard-headed realist and not the Marxist-Leninist ideologue found in the Gaddis narrative.¹⁸

Gaddis views the relations between the US and the USSR as that between implacable foes, one of which -- the USSR -- being motivated by an overriding interest to expand. For Professor Gaddis, the history of the Cold War is the unfolding of a struggle between good and evil and, despite a dearth of evidence, Gaddis avows he knows the identity of the devil. Offner sees both Truman and Stalin and their respective nations as flawed, but able to interact in good faith and hence capable of establishing sufficient trust and cooperation to guarantee normal relations. Such trust and cooperation was moreover attainable during and after a period of reappraisal of previous negotiated positions. In fact, Offner concludes that Truman's perspective was more flawed than Stalin's because Truman pressed his advantage too far.¹⁹ Being somewhat inexperienced in statecraft, and partisan politics, Truman's vision for collaborative possibilities between the US and USSR was narrow and overly domineering. Consequently, he adopted tactics which would inevitably (intentionally?) strain Stalin's sense of fair play that. He did this after 1946 in an attempt to force Stalin to loosen his grip on Eastern Europe. He also did this by back-pedaling on prior promises to prevent another German military build-up via a policy of permanent German de-industrialization and disarmament. While Offner's Stalin was a realist who understood that Truman's atomic "ace in the hole" entitled him to bargain far better terms than had been previously agreed, he intuitively knew that if he did not hold the line regarding Eastern Europe and Germany then the USSR's vital interest would not be taken seriously in the future negotiations. Stalin did not want to be marginalized like Great Britain, whose power Truman and his advisors scoffed at for having been mis-spent.

Truman, on the other hand, according to Offner, was drunk with new found (nuclear) power and chose, contrary to the advice of some of his closest advisers, including Byrnes, Stimson and Acheson, to press for further concessions from Stalin.²⁰ He was determined to have Stalin back down in Eastern Europe and also accede to the re-industrialization of Germany - a direct contravention of wartime agreements and a provocation by any standard of fairness. When Stalin held firm on Eastern Europe, Truman made a fateful decision, according to Offner: he stepped up the pressure by adopting the religious-nationalist rhetoric being promoted in Washington by Secretary of Navy Forrestal and by an obscure foreign service officer stationed in Moscow, George Kennan.²¹ Recklessly lacing his Truman doctrine speeches of 1947 with slogans borrowed from Kennan and Forrestal's ideological manifesto detailing why the Soviet Union could not be trusted, Truman's pronouncements could be justifiably considered as a "call to arms" to stop the spread of Soviet communism in Europe. Indeed, such had been urged in Churchill's "iron curtain" speech -- a phrase, incidentally, first used by Nazis.²² Truman's framing of US-Soviet relations in fundamentalist religious and nationalist terms received a predictable combative reaction from Stalin -- who hunkered down in Germany and Eastern Europe and

¹⁸ Arnold A. Offner, *Another Such Victory: President Truman and the Cold War, 1945-1953*, pp. 87-90 (hereafter Offner).

¹⁹ Offner, pp. 121-124.

²⁰ Offner, p. 123.

²¹ Offner, p. 123.

²² Offner, pp. 199-201.

began a military build up in order to close the power gap with the US. The overthrow of local regimes in Eastern Europe entailed ruthless repression and also an increased use of Marxist Leninist rhetoric to counter Truman's own expropriation of the Forrester-Kennan manifesto. But clearly Stalin's resort to Marxist Leninist dogma was at the level of rhetoric, only, for he made no moves threatening the new status quo although Soviet armies vastly outnumbered US and British forces in Europe and Stalin's spies in the US must have informed him that the US arsenal of atomic bombs as of 1947 could not have been of decisive military value. What is perfectly clear, to Offner, is that Truman made fatal errors of judgement that precipitated the slide into the Cold War.²³

Professor Leffler, too begins his narrative with Truman's recognition that the atomic bomb had altered the ratio of power significantly in favor of the US. But Leffler does not conclude that Truman's religious-nationalist cognitive disorder (Offner) or that Stalin's Marxist-Leninist dogmatism (Gaddis) created an irreversible slide into the Cold War. According to Leffler, both Truman and Stalin remained pragmatists regarding each other. Stalin still understood that he was a "junior partner" and Truman accepted Stalin as such -- though he was intent on conveying to Stalin that he had been demoted to a probationary status.²⁴ He wanted Stalin to tow the line peddled by the US, just as great Britain was learning to do. Leffler's Truman wanted to one-up Stalin, but he also wanted to be on friendly terms. Thus, according to Leffler, Truman vacillated between humiliating Stalin and praising him.²⁵ The circumstance which caused Truman to place more weight on the humiliation side of the scale was a growing realization that European reconstruction between the end of WWII and 1947 had been an abject failure and that economic and political instability opened opportunities for the USSR to exploit to its advantage.²⁶ Leffler cites an increase in communistic agitation and growth in the popularity and membership of communist parties in Western Europe as facts which could have major consequences for causing a shift in the balance of power between the US and the USSR. Truman's concern regarding an economic collapse and a subsequent political vacuum as being reported to him by his national security advisers tipped his not so refined political instincts in favor of vilifying Stalin and the USSR in terms the latter could only interpret as objectionable, going beyond the line of fair play. Truman, however, had willfully decided not only to use denunciatory rhetoric but also to institute aggressive policies (NATO, the Marshall plan) which could be reasonably construed as having hostile intent. NATO was a *military* alliance of Western Europe and the US and was directed by the US. Its claim to be purely defensive was undermined when US nuclear weapons were positioned into Western European countries and placed under the command of the US military. NATO's militaristic intent to intimidate was further reinforced in Stalin's mind when the future West Germany was not excluded from membership in NATO. The cold war was the consequence.

Leffler makes a strange case regarding Truman's recourse to these provocative policies when he suggests that Stalin could have viewed them in the framework of power politics and hence responded pragmatically instead of relying on Marxist-Leninist dogma as the lens through which to interpret Truman's actions. Stalin's lack of a pragmatic response, Leffler seems to suggest, is the event that confirmed for Truman Stalin's true aims of world domination.²⁷ Such a claim or

²³ Offner p. 211.

²⁴ Leffler, *For the Soul of Mankind*, p. 54. (hereafter Leffler).

²⁵ Leffler p. 48.

²⁶ Leffler, p. 63.

²⁷ Leffler, p. 66 .

conclusion turns a blind eye to the fact that Truman, as Offner has suggested, could have chosen to reject the religious-nationalist ideology proposed by James Forrestal and George Kennan. Evidence indicates he may have adopted it in order to pre-empt accusations by powerful Republican senators that he was soft on Stalin and hence an appeaser like Chamberlain. The latter criticism was resonating with the American public during the mid-term election campaigns of 1946. However, Leffler describes Truman as pragmatic; a pragmatic politician would have been able to effectively distinguish between rhetoric and reality. Truman did not in fact make that distinction. Stalin, by way of contrast, was not reasoning erroneously when he concluded that Truman had chosen a path of implacable hostility -- he had! Truman's hostility was reinforced by his religious-nationalist ideology. Truman's ideology, in turn, confused Stalin with Trotsky, (wrongly). Trotsky was (in fact) a deluded true believer. Stalin in contrast was a realistic pragmatist. Truman was wrong when he attributed Stalin's ruthless repression in Eastern Europe as proof of Stalin's supposed unlimited ambition to spread Soviet communism. All it proved was that Stalin clamped down when he realized that Truman was openly committed to overturning assurance that the US would never allow Germany to reindustrialize or again send its armies through Eastern Europe to attack Soviet Russia.

Neither Offner or Leffler offer a narrative that effectively account for the sudden shift after 1947 to policies regarding the USSR which caused a seemingly irreversible drift into what became known as the Cold War. When Winston Churchill made his infamous "Iron Curtain" speech of 1946, comparing the USSR with Nazi Germany only one year after the defeat of the genocidal fascists, Truman wisely did not indicate support for the hard line taken by Churchill echoing the dark fascist past and practically calculated to heat up a US-USSR rivalry to the benefit of Britain. What happened then in 1947 and 1948 to draw Truman into Churchill's fearful confrontational world? Why did Truman feel compelled to invoke the "fire and brimstone" imagery and rhetoric and direct that against Stalin? Offner concludes that Truman's intellectual capacity wasn't up to par -- he was unable to accurately and judiciously assess the bargaining possibilities and relationship of the US and USSR; mainly, Truman failed to understand that overplaying his hand and forcing his former ally into a corner would only make matters worse. Leffler's reasoning on this riddle(?) falls apart altogether as he seems to suggest that Stalin should have known better than to fall back on Marxist-Leninist dogma to interpret Truman's actions. For Gaddis, there is no problem because zero-sum rivalry between the US and USSR was implicit given the clash of incompatible national and ideological ambitions and presumptions. Both Leffner's and Offner's analyses hint at a solution when they conclude that Truman fell hostage to the "fire and brimstone" rhetoric he lifted from the Kennan ideology. But Leffler and Offner gleaned only part of the truth of what really happened. Hogan provides the rest of the story.

Michael Hogan

According to Hogan, Truman's political instincts were not necessarily deficient. He did not want a policy amounting to an all out effort to rearm and instructed his new Secretary of State General George Marshall to reign in the overly ambitious appropriation requests of the Joint Chiefs. Truman and Marshall according to Hogan favored just enough spending to effectively demonstrate to the USSR that they were serious about containing Soviet ambitions in Europe -- as they perceived it -- and not one penny more.²⁸ They did not want to provoke an aggressive response from Stalin and believed that their actions would not be construed by Stalin as being

²⁸ Michael J. Hogan, *A Cross of Iron: Harry S. Truman and the Origins of the National Security State, 1945-1954*, p. 104-105 (Hereafter Hogan).

excessive given the power ratio between the US and USSR. Truman's "moderation" resulted in a near-mutiny among the Joint Chiefs who undertook an effort to deal independently with members of Congress.²⁹ Hogan suggests that if not for General Marshall's support for the President's cautious approach to dealing with Stalin by not allowing US military appropriations to reach alarming levels, a major blow up could have occurred in 1947.

What tipped the battle over military appropriations in favor of the extremist position of the military (and their civilian national security allies like Clark Clifford, Paul Nitze and Kennan) was the Soviet coup in Czechoslovakia in early 1948 where non-communist leaders were brutally eliminated and replaced with men hand-picked by Stalin.³⁰ The military and civilian proponents of an unprecedented arms build up prevailed over resistance from Truman and Republican senators. The latter's position on appropriations had been determined by concerns about federal spending and military encroachment into civilian affairs. Anti Soviet hysteria dressed in the denunciatory rhetoric of an American crusade against evil Soviet Communism found in the Kennan-Forrestal ideology stirred up national passions which carried the day. Republican Senators like Taft and Vandenberg chose to reverse their traditional hostility for large budgets because they allowed themselves to be convinced that spending profusely on military mobilization was preferable to either not spending or approving allocations for New Deal programs. According to Hogan, the military and civilian agents for unprecedented war mobilization should share the blame for this capitulation, not Truman, who tried to prevent it! And by implication, Stalin should receive little if any opprobrium from historians. The USSR was neither destined by Marxist-Leninist ideology or by self appointment to become an implacable foe of the US.

George Kennan's years in retirement were spent in trying to absolve himself from affiliation with the Cold War ideology his *Mr. X* memorandum created. He came to realize that its overstatements and mis-statements regarding the USSR's positions were used for the end of pursuing policies resulting in de-stabilizing the post-World War II peace. Kennan would have preferred a policy toward the USSR based on realistic assumptions about Stalin's power and behavior as judged by an objective assessment of the evidence.

Conclusions:

This work has presented the ideas in ascending order of intellectual rigor. We started with the least accurate analysis, the one which however carried the day in 1948 – simplicissimus, Stalin as an ideologue and a global menace aiming at world domination. The perception of the relationship between Stalin and Truman by Western scholars over time has become more and more refined and more and more accurate to conclude with what can be seen as today's basically accurate picture. Stalin, constrained and then cornered, fought hard and rationally just to maintain those concessions which had been promised to him and the Soviet people for their blood sacrifices in World War II. He had no visions of global domination, just an aim of Soviet self preservation. Truman, likewise constrained by domestic economic and ideological pressures -- the religious and nationalist dogmatists as well as the militarist industrialists -- took up policies to press home the unexpected nuclear advantage which the US acquired after the surrender of Nazi Germany. Meanwhile, Churchill, ever on the periphery, perceptively strove to improve the terribly marginalized position of the former British Empire, an empire Hitler correctly predicted would

²⁹ Hogan, p. 108.

³⁰ Hogan, p. 112.

be destroyed by the war in Europe. Churchill and his Home Office did this by attempting to play off the US and USSR against each other whether in Iran, Greece or Berlin. Rather than see the conflict in simplistic binary terms of an ideological zero sum conflict, this paper has argued for a more balanced and nuanced perspective. Both Truman and Stalin, though cognitively flawed, could often penetrate to the core of a complex situation and both at times sincerely desired to collaborate with each other. But, in the end, their clarity of mind failed them during crucial tests. Truman, for his part, was more ideological than Stalin and overplayed the U.S. position. This in turn brought out responses from Stalin which added more fuel to already overheated passions. The lessons for contemporary policy makers are implicit: to see Putin's Russia as ideologically driven and determined is almost certainly inaccurate. To see "the West" as a monolithic actor with a universal ideology and appeal is likewise overly simplistic. Prudent action and reaction in international relations requires realistic appraisals of partners and opponents. Just as the US misapprehended Stalin, in a position of absolute global domination, the US today, in a much weaker position likewise misapprehends a rising Russia. But those ideas are for another work at another date.