

“A Riddle Wrapped in a Mystery Inside an Enigma”
American Diplomatic History and the Debate Over Soviet Foreign Policy
in the Early Cold War

by

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ABSTRACT

Diplomatic historians have made diverse claims about the nature of Soviet motivation and its significance to the early Cold War (1945-50) period. State motivation, a nebulous concept in any case, was particularly difficult to define for the Soviet Union; historians writing during the Cold War had to contend with a “black box” situation in which little primary source material was available on the inner workings of the Kremlin’s foreign policy apparatus. Several major characterizations of Soviet motivation were advanced, each embedded with assumptions about Moscow’s policy objectives that were difficult to disprove, and each connected to plausible but discrepant narratives of the superpower struggle. Curiously, the popularity of the various explanations for Soviet foreign policy mirrored the contemporary political situation in the West, and this phenomenon extended into the post-Cold War era as well, with the present shaping the interpretation of new evidence from communist archival sources.

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Introduction

In Cold War diplomatic history, few issues have found themselves mired in as much controversy as that of the motivation underlying the foreign policy of the Soviet Union. Debate was particularly heated among American diplomatic historians, for whom the problem of ascertaining Moscow's intentions became a decisive factor in shaping interpretive divisions. Those historians who failed to accept the "true" conception of Soviet motivation, however that was defined, were accused of professional misconduct ranging from the misinterpretation of source documents to the deliberate falsification of history itself. Robert J. Maddox complained that revisionist historians "all too often proceed to judge Stalin's actions as though they were privy to his most confidential thoughts" and "almost invariably construe his policies in the most favorable light."¹ Conversely, Lloyd C. Gardner reproached orthodox scholars for failing to question the official line put forth by the American government about the Soviet role in the Cold War, thus allowing the substance of their interpretations to be determined in advance. "If the President said that the Soviet Union had violated forty-seven pacts and treaties," he wrote, "the State Department scurried around to draw up a list to conform to the accusation, and Cold War historians all too often came following after."² Sadly, amidst inkwells brimming with venom, the methodological difficulties shared by *all* diplomatic historians in writing about Soviet intentions in the early Cold War period stood in remarkable neglect.

¹ Robert James Maddox, *The New Left and the Origins of the Cold War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), 9.

² Lloyd C. Gardner, *Architects of Illusion: Men and Ideas in American Foreign Policy, 1941-1949*, (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1970), 301.

In order to write effectively about the major events of the early Cold War period, diplomatic historians required knowledge, presumed or otherwise, of the motives underpinning the Kremlin's foreign policy.³ Scholars had to confront numerous questions pertaining to the nature of Moscow's intentions, which Winston Churchill once famously described as "a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma."⁴ Was Soviet expansion at the end of the Second World War a product of the insatiable need for aggrandizement that was intrinsic to any totalitarian society? Or were Moscow officials merely using Marxist-Leninist language as a rhetorical instrument in the service of Russian national interests? The manner in which historians characterized Soviet motivation was connected to their evaluation of U.S. foreign policy as well. Was the United States too lenient toward the Soviet Union? Or was the United States too inflexible and suspicious of its erstwhile ally? Were policy alternatives available to Washington officials that, predicated on a different characterization of Moscow's intentions, might have mitigated the conflict? Should the United States have attempted to negotiate with the Soviet Union on the basis of traditional great power diplomacy following the Second World War? Or was any attempt to achieve a *modus vivendi* destined to provide yet another opportunity for the U.S.S.R. to expand into any area where it was not met by effective counter-force? Such questions were (and still are) of deep concern to diplomatic historians studying the early Cold War period, and could be

³ This is not to imply that Cold War historiography may in some way be reduced to the issue of Soviet motivation or that diplomatic historians were only concerned with Soviet intentions. However, within American diplomatic historiography – the focus of this study – the Soviet Union remained that enigmatic component against which American diplomatic activity was measured. As a result, American diplomatic historiography tended to proceed on the basis of establishing a characterization of Soviet motivation, and then evaluating the activities of the United States on that basis.

⁴ Discussed in Samuel L. Sharp, "National Interest: Key to Soviet Politics," in *The Cold War: Ideological Conflict or Power Struggle?*, ed. Graebner (Boston: D.C. Heath, 1963), 71. First published in *Problems of*

answered in vastly different ways depending upon the characterization of the Kremlin's foreign policy motivation that a given historian accepted. There is thus an inextricable link between the intentions undergirding Soviet diplomatic behavior and historical explanations of the superpower conflict. Indeed, formulating an adequate narrative account of the latter required the historian to settle upon some definition of Moscow's motives in order to organize the available evidence and confer meaning upon events.⁵

However, diplomatic historians writing during the Cold War were trapped in a perplexing situation where the need to account for Moscow's intentions was hindered by the inaccessibility of Eastern bloc archives. Given the closed nature of communist governments, the indeterminate relationship between Marxist-Leninist theory, totalitarian domestic structures, and diplomatic practice, and the constant flow of misinformation from the Kremlin, the basis for sound historical judgment was precarious at best. Lacking direct sources on the internal operation of Soviet Union officialdom, diplomatic historians were faced with a "black box" situation in which the intentions that informed Soviet behavior were matters of considerable speculation. It is not overly surprising that different and even contradictory renderings of Moscow's intentions developed during this period. Diplomatic historians of a liberal or conservative persuasion passionately proclaimed that the Soviet Union was a totalitarian society driven by an insatiable lust for world domination. Realist historians argued that Moscow's foreign policy was oriented toward the pursuit of Russian national interests within a hostile and anarchic international environment. Revisionist scholars spoke of a Soviet Union in pursuit of the rather

Communism 7 (March-April 1958), 15-21. As Sharp rightly noted, Churchill followed this quote with the suggestion that Russian national interest might provide the explanatory "key" to Soviet behavior.

modest security objectives required for its self-preservation against external threat. Certain historians attempted to wade through the mire and formulate a synthesis of the opposing views, although such attempts, valiant though they were, only further fragmented the field.⁶ Differences of opinion on seemingly minor details of Soviet foreign policy motivation frequently exploded into heated debate, since even subtle variations could lead to vastly different ways of understanding and writing about the Cold War.

Moscow's behavior in the international arena was rarely, if ever, exhausted by a single interpretation. Several different factors, including totalitarianism, Marxist-Leninist ideology, and the more or less aggressive pursuit of Russian national interests could all be assigned a primary position in the hierarchy of Soviet motives. The difficult task of writing about the early Cold War was compounded by the interpretive plausibility demonstrated by several quite different configurations of the Kremlin's motivational hierarchy advanced by historians, which resulted in divergent explanations for how and why the Cold War originated. The problem ran deeper still, as the documentary evidence about Soviet diplomacy available at any given time was always sufficiently ambiguous to sustain multiple interpretations. As a result, for historians to sort through this body of information and confer meaning upon it, some conception of the Kremlin's motivation was required in advance of archival research in order to separate the significant sources

⁵ On the importance of Soviet motivation to Cold War historical narratives, see William C. Wohlforth, "New Evidence on the Cold War: Ambiguity in Search of Theory," *Diplomatic History* 21, no. 2 (Spring 1997), 231.

⁶ For two fine historiographical overviews of the literature, see Howard Jones and Randall B. Woods, "Origins of the Cold War in Europe and the Near East: Recent Historiography and the National Security Imperative," in *America in the World: The Historiography of American Foreign Relations Since 1941*, ed. Michael J. Hogan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995; reprint, 1999); and J. Samuel Walker, "Historians and Cold War Origins: The New Consensus," in *American Foreign Relations: A*

from the insignificant. In a circular process, the accepted characterization of Soviet intentions provided the frame of reference by which historians conducted their research, and this research then tended to confirm preexisting views.⁷

While the interrelated problems of conferring meaning upon events and ascribing truth-value to evidence is common to historians of every field, the challenge was, and remains, particularly intense for early Cold War historiography. Scholars attempted to explain the origins of a conflict in which national interests and moral orders, in this case the individual liberty of capitalism against the collective equality of communism, were both seemingly at stake, although the precise relationship of one to the other was exceptionally ambiguous. Less ambiguous, however, were the political consequences that emerged from the different ways in which historical narratives addressed this interplay between particular interests and moral universals. As the foreign policies of both superpowers were connected to competing models for moral order, the support or critique of past events inevitably possessed certain implications for the identity of both superpowers. Moreover, because the Cold War was a relatively protracted phenomenon, a robust historiography of its origins had developed well prior to the termination of the event itself. To a striking degree, the major interpretive schools that comprise the American historiography of the early Cold War were established and popularized in a manner that mirrored contemporary political sentiment in the United States.⁸ This had an

Historiographical Review, eds. Gerald K. Haines and J. Samuel Walker (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1981).

⁷ On the role of the historian's frame of reference relative to evidence, and interpretation more generally, see Dominick LaCapra, *Rethinking Intellectual History: Texts, Contexts, Language* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1983), 31.

⁸ Writing of the relationship between historiography and domestic events in 1970, J. Joseph Huthmacher and Warren I. Susman posed the question: "Who can tell what effects another shift in the external world situation – which has governed attitudes toward the Cold War so importantly in the past – may produce

interesting effect upon the historiography, for dominant views on the nature of Soviet motives in the past seemed to shift and transform with remarkable parallels to contemporary Soviet-American relations and, more broadly, the U.S. role in world affairs. Thus, the manner in which a given historian chose between the competing explanations of Soviet motivation not only affected his or her characterization of the communist superpower, but also invited a particular analysis of current American policy and, by extension, U.S. identity.

Many, if not most, American diplomatic historians made connections within their respective texts among the past, the present, and the future. While the assumption that an improved understanding of the past could lead to superior policy decisions in the future was certainly not a conceit restricted to this group of diplomatic historians, it pervaded narratives of the early Cold War to a remarkable degree. For instance, in the 1960s, when realists and revisionists wrote critical appraisals of the wide-ranging policies that the United States formulated in the late 1940s, they often included a critique, if implicit, of the Vietnam War. Peter Novick suggested that there was a significant link between the contemporary political situation and the manner in which historians thought about the past:

The sixties provided a congenial climate for a revised view of the origins of the Cold War. If fewer and fewer at this time accepted that American “vital interests” were at stake in Southeast Asia, was it not reasonable to ask if the same was true of Eastern Europe in the 1940s?...If ill-considered American global interventionism had landed us in this bloodiest manifestation of the Cold War, was it not at least worth considering whether the same hubris had been responsible for the larger conflict of which it was a part?⁹

upon the writing of Cold War history in the future?” J. Joseph Huthmacher and Warren I. Susman, eds., *The Origins of the Cold War* (Waltham, MA: Ginn and Company, 1970), viii.

⁹ Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The “Objectivity Question” and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 448-49.

To a certain extent, the debate over Moscow's foreign policy was enriched by developments in the post-Cold War era. As the communist bloc was dismantled and liberal democracy courted, previously inaccessible archives were gradually opened to historians. Despite the incomplete and often politically-motivated manner in which archival access was granted, significant new information did emerge which stripped the "black box" of its inscrutable casement and illumined the inner workings of Soviet foreign policy, to a limited degree. Diplomatic historians were now able to access the archives of the Politburo, the Comintern, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and more limited access was occasionally granted for the archives of the Ministry of Defense, the General Staff, and the KGB. Archival sources from China, North Korea, Central and Eastern Europe, and other former communist bloc nations were also made available to western scholars.¹⁰ But, contrary to the hopes of many historians, the new evidence that did emerge failed to resolve debate over Soviet motivation, even if it did add sophistication and depth to that discussion. Jonathan Haslam described the impact of access to Soviet archives as a "sobering" experience for Cold War historians. "Instead of a quantum leap in our understanding of Soviet foreign policy," historians "were presented with a patchy set of often melodramatic revelations...insufficient to provide definitive answers to any significant questions."¹¹

Historians of all interpretive persuasions marshaled the new evidence in order to support their own understandings and cast doubts on contrary views. Surprisingly, the new evidence proved remarkably successful at justifying each perspective. Or, more

¹⁰ Jonathan Haslam, "Russian Archival Revelations and Our Understanding of the Cold War," *Diplomatic History* 21, no. 2 (Spring 1997), 218-21; Raymond L. Garthoff, "Some Observations on Using the Soviet Archives," *ibid.*, 243-45. For an overview of historiographical developments based on the post-Cold War

accurately, it proved remarkably unsuccessful at disproving any particular perspective. Of course, the new evidence did play an important role in adding balance to analyses of events that had previously been, of necessity, narrowly researched. However, the major postulates of all the main schools of thought on Soviet motivation remained intact despite the influx of primary source documents about the Kremlin's foreign policy. The structure of explanations that informed historiographical debate during the Cold War proved quite resilient in its encounter with the new evidence. While the tone of that debate was, for the most part, no longer as vitriolic as that displayed in the United States during the Vietnam War, the interpretive divisions continued along similar lines.

As this study argues, for the diplomatic historiography of the early Cold War period, the manifold ways in which motivation could be ascribed to the Soviet Union emerged as a contested topic that not only affected the representation of the communist superpower but also served as the "other" against which the identity and policies of the United States were evaluated as they existed in the past as well as in the present.¹² The indeterminacy of meaning surrounding the Kremlin's motivation, then, served as a "gap" in the referential record into which the ideological inclinations of diplomatic historians were projected in a way that disclosed certain ways of understanding the Cold War while concealing others.¹³ There is a need, then, to analyze the claims about Soviet foreign

evidence, see Melvyn P. Leffler, "Inside Enemy Archives: The Cold War Reopened," *Foreign Affairs* 75, no. 4 (July/August 1996): 120-35.

¹¹ Haslam, 217.

¹² On the connection between Soviet Union foreign policy and American identity, see Anders Stephanson, "Liberty or Death: The Cold War as U.S. Ideology," in *Reviewing the Cold War: Approaches, Interpretations, Theory*, ed. Odd Arne Westad (London: Frank Cass, 2000); and David Campbell, *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1992).

¹³ On the role of ideology in the writing of history, and specifically as something that is not distortive of past reality so much as it is necessary to and productive of historical understanding, see Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, trans. and ed. David E. Linge (Berkeley: University of California, 1976), 8-11; Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation*

policy motivation as conceptualized by diplomatic historians, and to explore how those claims produced certain ways of writing about the Soviet Union and the Cold War more generally. Why did diplomatic historians writing during the Cold War put forth such divergent interpretations of the Kremlin's diplomatic ambitions? What sort of assumptions did scholars make about Moscow's intentions? Why has the "new" evidence that emerged in the post-Cold War era not resolved the old debates? And what do the answers to these questions tell us about the nature of Cold War diplomatic history?

Chapter One: Orthodoxy

In the aftermath of the Second World War, one of the main concerns for diplomatic historians was to explain how and why the relationship between two erstwhile allies, the United States and the Soviet Union, deteriorated so rapidly. In tandem with scholars of political science and international relations, diplomatic historians were quick to advance explanations for this perplexing phenomenon.¹⁴ Given the dearth of primary sources pertaining to the internal operation of Moscow's foreign policy apparatus, historians such as Arthur Schlesinger and James Burnham drew upon the burgeoning body of theory concerned with totalitarianism in order to explain Soviet behavior. As Burnham claimed, the totalitarianist orientation of the Soviet Union provided sufficient ground for inferring state motivation in and of itself; any further evidence would either support the existence of the "world-wide, conspiratorial movement" that he posited, or otherwise be little more than the delusional fabrications typical of a totalitarian state.¹⁵ This view of the Kremlin's diplomatic conduct as the product of a totalitarian ideology that, by definition, compelled inexorable expansion, was representative of the orthodox/traditionalist Cold War interpretation that developed in the late 1940s.¹⁶

In those formative years of American Cold War historiography, the main interpretive subdivision of the orthodox school closely paralleled the two-party structure of U.S. politics. While the liberal school favored the philosophy, values, and policy decisions of the Democratic Party, the conservative school was predisposed to the

¹⁴ James Burnham, *The Struggle for the World* (Cornwall, NY: Cornwall, 1947); Arthur J. Schlesinger Jr., *The Vital Center: The Politics of Freedom* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1949).

¹⁵ Burnham, 59.

¹⁶ For a discussion of the totalitarian state as it pertained to the origins of the Cold War, see Schlesinger, *Vital Center*, 53-69.

Republicans. Given that the administrations of the Second World War and the early Cold War period were Democratic, liberals tended to defend U.S. foreign policy while conservatives frequently condemned it. That the historiographical field would reflect U.S. political culture is unsurprising, as both Democratic and Republican parties put their own spin on the events of the day, providing obvious points of departure for diplomatic historians. Furthermore, many of those historians had close relations, if not direct involvement, with the United States government. George F. Kennan, Arthur Schlesinger, Herbert Feis, and Charles Bohlen, among others, were associated with America's policy elite.¹⁷ American political culture thus provided a preexisting set of interpretive positions toward which diplomatic historians (politically-minded by the very nature of their expertise) tended to gravitate.¹⁸

In general, there was widespread consensus among liberals and conservatives on the magnitude of the Russian menace and on the consequent role that the United States should play within international society. The main difference between the liberal and conservative sub-schools, then, was over the most appropriate policy decisions that Washington could have made in order to counter the danger of Soviet communism. Liberal historians tended to defend the policies of the Roosevelt and Truman administrations as pragmatic and effective.¹⁹ This group of historians argued that a variety of interrelated factors constrained America's freedom of action in the

¹⁷ Richard A. Melanson, *Writing History and Making Policy: The Cold War, Vietnam, and Revisionism* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1983), 9-42.

¹⁸ The other major school of historical analysis active since the inception of the Cold War was realism, which advanced a critique of America's idealistic foreign policy and the role that this played in the early Cold War. Realism is frequently subsumed under the orthodox banner, along with liberalism and conservatism, in that it tends to assign primary responsibility for the Cold War to the Soviet Union. However, in its characterization of Soviet foreign policy motivation, realism offered a significantly different portrayal. As such, realism will be considered separately from orthodoxy.

¹⁹ Schlesinger, *Vital Center*, 222-228.

international arena during and after the Second World War, including the need to preserve the wartime alliance until the defeat of Japan and the geostrategic difficulties that precluded the effective projection of American power everywhere on the globe.²⁰

While not completely uncritical of certain policies or functionaries within the Democratic administrations,²¹ liberals stressed that the prudent diplomatic policy formulated during the early Cold War countered Soviet expansion to the best of U.S. abilities.²²

In contrast, conservative historians were critical of the Roosevelt and Truman administrations for failing to pursue a more uncompromising policy vis-à-vis Stalin and the Soviet Union. Conservatives blasted the Democratic response as inconsistent and inadequate in light of the massive threat posed by the U.S.S.R.²³ The indecisiveness of the executive branch and its foreign policy staff led to problematic arrangements at the end of the Second World War that needlessly placed the Soviet Union in an advantageous position on the European continent. Conservatives maintained that the United States should have deployed its superior economic and military resources, in conjunction with an unwavering anticommunist vision, in order to prevent any territorial aggrandizement by the Soviet Union. This view contended that negotiation and compromise with Stalin were the hallmark of a naïve Democratic policy that failed to hinder, let alone roll back, the virus-like spread of communism.²⁴

²⁰ Herbert Feis, *From Trust to Terror: The Onset of the Cold War, 1945-1950* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1970), 15.

²¹ For instance, Feis, 26. Feis speculates that, while it was never feasible for the U.S. administration to forcibly counteract Soviet expansion during the Second World War, a firmer stance at the Yalta Conference might have caused Stalin to relinquish Poland.

²² Schlesinger, *Vital Center*, 236-37.

²³ Burnham, 13.

²⁴ William Henry Chamberlin, *America's Second Crusade* (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1950), 217, 231, 343. For a critique of the Roosevelt administration, see 348-53.

Despite heated controversies, both the liberal and conservative positions shared in their orthodox understanding of the Cold War. In general, explanations from either side tended to proceed along the lines of Arthur Schlesinger's famous description of the Cold War as "the brave and essential response of free men to communist aggression."²⁵ According to the standard orthodox narrative of the early Cold War, the U.S.S.R. was an indisputable threat to global peace, and only the United States possessed sufficient strength to protect democratic nations from communist subversion. The Soviet Union, in the view of nearly all traditionalist historians, was a monstrous evil bent on world domination, whose unlimited ambitions included the destruction of liberalism, democracy, and human rights. This objective was intrinsic to the very structure of a totalitarian regime, which needed external enemies in order to justify repression at home and expansion abroad.²⁶ These had been lessons well-learned in the years prior to the Second World War, when the attempts by the Western democracies to appease Nazi Germany's inexorable quest for *lebensraum* resulted in a tragic failure. Given that all totalitarian regimes were fundamentally similar, according to totalitarianist theory, it was of the utmost importance that the United States firmly resist the phenomenon frequently described as "red fascism."²⁷ Moreover, by the very nature of Moscow's totalitarian foreign policy, the Soviet Union constituted a threat in excess of that provided by a more

²⁵ Schlesinger, Chapter 2, in Huthmacher and Susman, 43.

²⁶ The connection between the totalitarian state and its foreign policy is argued in Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1951), 393-98. Schlesinger wrote on the subject: "A totalitarian system... is a system of tension; and a convenient way to maintain the tension is to invoke the threat of external war.... When internal discontents and internal contradictions press too hard upon the Hitlers and Stalins, foreign adventurism provides the irresistible solution.... Today the satellite states of Eastern Europe are being readied for incorporation into the Soviet Union itself. Tomorrow Soviet power will surely spread everywhere that it meets no firm resistance." Schlesinger, *Vital Center*, 97-98.

²⁷ The origin and use of the related concepts of totalitarianism and "red fascism" by American scholars, politicians, and media is explored in Thomas G. Paterson, *Meeting the Communist Threat: Truman to Reagan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 3-17.

traditional state operating within the confines of “normal” diplomacy, or *realpolitik*. As a result, an unusually ambitious foreign policy had to be instituted by the United States in order to counter this abnormal danger, orthodox historians argued.

According to the orthodox interpretation, Moscow bore sole responsibility for instigating the Cold War conflict. Intrinsic to the very nature of the Soviet regime was a set of social, political, and economic values which were innately hostile to the institutions championed by the West, particularly the United States. Authoritarian, statist, and repressive, the Soviet Union was portrayed as the negative image of liberal democracy in orthodox narratives. In a series of lectures delivered in 1969, Charles Bohlen, an orthodox historian who had held several positions within the U.S. foreign policy establishment prior to and during the Cold War, reminded his audience that “to accuse the United States of [unjustified or unprovoked] anti-communist sentiment is to ignore the fact that communism, by its very nature, is deeply and permanently anti-American.”²⁸ Following Bohlen’s argument, the Soviet Union was instinctively and irrevocably anti-American, for the United States served as the embodiment of the very freedoms that totalitarianism was compelled to eradicate.

As the orthodox interpretation of Soviet intentions was formulated near the very beginning of the Cold War, primary sources from both Western and Soviet archives were virtually non-existent. While deprived of the documentary evidence on Soviet conduct that communist archives presumably possessed, historians writing during the period proved resourceful in supporting their interpretations through other sources. These included the public statements of Kremlin functionaries, the available records of

²⁸ Charles E. Bohlen, *The Transformation of American Foreign Policy* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1969), 101.

diplomatic conferences, newsletters and other materials published by the Soviet press and disseminated to communist party members internationally, interviews with and memoirs written by western diplomats who had first-hand experience dealing with the Soviet Union, contemporary media reports, and interviews with refugees or exiles from the Soviet bloc.²⁹ What the available body of evidence lacked, of course, was source material from inside the communist bloc which could provide insight into the Kremlin's security concerns, its perceptions and fears of Western capitalism, its relationship to other communist bloc nations, and the role of Marxist-Leninist ideology in policy formation.

Given the absence of direct evidence on the functioning of the Kremlin's diplomatic apparatus, orthodox historians relied heavily upon publicly available ideological texts and speeches in order to support their characterization of Moscow's foreign affairs. As these sources tended to be laden with references to Marxist-Leninist ideology, they comported with the motivational hierarchy that orthodox historians used in order to comprehend Soviet behavior. As traditionalist scholars gave particular weight to the ideological underpinnings of Moscow's international conduct (which was one of the hallmarks of a totalitarian nation), ideological statements found in the documentary evidence were accorded special value as the clearest of all possible windows into the world of Soviet motivation. Just as the world only had to reference Hitler's *Mein Kampf* in order to understand the horrific extent of Nazi ambitions, so too did the world only

²⁹ Feis was well-acquainted with the upper echelons of the U.S. government and enlisted an impressive array of interviewees – primarily but not exclusively from the American foreign policy establishment – for *Trust to Terror*. These included Averell Harriman, James F. Byrnes, Paul Nitze, George F. Kennan, and Jean Monnet. See Feis, x. Ellis Zacharias summarized his “bona fide intelligence sources” as “the examination of documents, discussions with statesmen, diplomats, high-ranking officers,” and research of media and secondary sources. Among those interviewed were “237 diplomats from behind the iron curtain,” although such informants were reportedly assigned pseudonyms to protect their identity. Ellis M. Zacharias, *Behind Closed Doors: The Secret History of the Cold War* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1950), 333 fn.1, 336 fn.5.

have to note the numerous statements about the inevitability of communist revolution in order to understand the nature of Stalin's ambitions. Affirming the centrality of ideology for Soviet motivation, Bohlen explained that "the reason the Soviets acted as they did [in the early Cold War period] is perfectly clear. They were still convinced of the correctness and infallibility of the doctrines of Karl Marx and, even more so, of those of Lenin."³⁰

However, there was conceptual difficulty in connecting the internationalist orientation of Marxism with Russia's national interests, which also seemed to serve as motivation for the Kremlin's behavior. Traditionalists resolved this seeming paradox in Soviet foreign policy by emphasizing the role of the Soviet Union as the locus of the communist revolution. Thus, foreign policy decisions that ran counter to Marxist-Leninist tenets could be pursued if they were seen as protecting Russia, which was the "vital center" of the communist bloc.³¹ Ellis Zacharias, a retired admiral of the United States Navy who published a conservative historical text in 1950, suggested that the communist superpower was distinctly ideological; however, this ideology had been twisted to serve traditional Russian interests in tandem with the objective of fomenting an international revolution.³² Traditionalists emphasized that achieving Russian national security was not an end in itself, but merely the first phase in a larger project of world

³⁰ Bohlen, 75-76.

³¹ Schlesinger, *Vital Center*, 6-10. For Schlesinger, both the United States and the Soviet Union were "vital centers" after the Second World War. Each espoused a different model of social, political, and economic organization which it wanted to institute internationally and each had that mixture of power and ambition necessary to pursue a project of such magnitude. As such, Schlesinger's notion of the "vital center" involved a juxtaposition of the "free society" of American capitalism to the "totalitarianism" of Soviet communism.

³² Zacharias, 12. Zacharias claimed that Stalin accepted the Marxist-Leninist argument that capitalist nations, by the very nature of their imperialistic competition, would incite yet another mass political crisis. Stalin planned to use that forthcoming conflagration in order to "smash the Atlantic Union" and "undermine American dynamism at home and abroad" (31-33).

domination. As a result, the conditions for Soviet expansion had to be vigilantly contained (or, as some conservatives argued, pro-actively rolled back) at any number of points throughout the globe, or the West risked opening the floodgates to continued enlargement of the communist world.³³

As Stalin was portrayed as the absolute and unquestioned authority dictating the Kremlin's foreign policy, characterizations of his personality were of prime importance to orthodox explanations of Soviet affairs. Stalin was represented as simultaneously brutal, shrewd, and paranoid, a revolutionary romantic well aware of the strategic value of pragmatism and *realpolitik* in securing the lofty aims of the ideology he championed. Herbert Feis emphasized Stalin's duplicitous conduct at the diplomatic level where he ensured that his intentions were unclear and that his promises were "cunningly qualified as to allow leeway for his deviations."³⁴ While Feis conceded that Stalin's fear of a rearmed Germany and another bout of capitalist encirclement did play a genuine role in determining strategic objectives, this did not excuse the "bruising Communist pressure on Central and Eastern Europe" which Stalin sanctioned.³⁵ Orthodox interpretations characterized the communist dictator's brutal actions on the Soviet periphery as symptomatic of the totalitarian state's desire to raze democratic structures at every opportunity.³⁶ Thus, while primary sources pertaining to Stalin's actual thinking and intentions were unavailable, orthodox historians inferred the motives behind his policies and decisions by reading them in light of totalitarian theory.

³³ For a critical analysis of this theme, see Stephanson, "Liberty or Death," 88.

³⁴ Feis, 47. The theme of Soviet and western governments creatively interpreting the wording of certain agreements in order to support their respective interests is a frequent theme of Feis' writing. However, such deceptive tactics were favored primarily by the Soviets, according to Feis. See, for instance, Feis' discussion of Molotov's negotiations at the Paris Peace Conference in 1946 (127).

³⁵ Feis, 132-33.

³⁶ Feis, 174-75.

In the U.S.S.R.'s relationship to bloc nations and communist parties in the First and Third Worlds, traditionalists viewed these foreign communists as beholden to the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. This assumption was supported by pointing to the internationalist orientation of the communist movement frequently mentioned in Marxist texts. Citing examples from the Marxist canon, Burnham adamantly charged that nationalism provided no effective basis for distinguishing between communists. The internationalist tenets of the ideology, he warned, took precedence over other concerns, associations, and loyalties:

It is a major effort of the propaganda of communists, and their dupes, to make us believe that Russian communists and American communists and Chinese communists and Yugoslavian communists are not the same thing....The programmatic differences among the communist parties of various nations are themselves decided by the common center. These are never more than tactical variations, suited to the particular national conditions at the particular time.³⁷

Burnham continued to hammer the point, describing the Greek communist party ("like all communist parties") as "a section of the international communist movement....led, in all of its activities, from its supreme headquarters within the Soviet Union."³⁸ Similarly, in Eastern Europe, Moscow's typical strategy involved instructing local communists to incite domestic provocation in unstable nations in order to facilitate a quick seizure of power.³⁹ Exemplifying the orthodox affinity for the totalitarian thesis, with the connection that it established between National Socialism and Stalinism, Zacharias compared the Soviet desire for a coordinated satellite system in Eastern Europe with the National Socialist *Gleichschaltung*.⁴⁰ Analogies of this sort were common in orthodox literature and reinforced the presupposition of totalitarian theory that the Soviet Union

³⁷ Burnham, 60.

³⁸ Burnham, 1.

³⁹ Chamberlin, 221-31, 258-84; Burnham, 64.

was pursuing its security interests as a pretext to a much larger and more ambitious project of continental (and perhaps world) domination that paralleled Nazi Germany.

Given the orthodox characterization of Soviet motivation, the question of its effect upon the writing of Cold War history remains. Both liberal and conservative historians shared a common set of beliefs that informed their respective narratives. One such belief involved the superiority of American values and institutions, which was understood in distinctly moral terms. Embedded in this moralistic definition of American identity and purpose was a desire to universalize those values and institutions. It was felt that the establishment of this moral order would lead to a marked decrease in the frequency and intensity of international conflict, if only because democracy imposed certain constraints upon the ambitions of state leaders. By extension, a consensus emerged among diplomatic historians on the moral inferiority of the Soviet regime which, given its totalitarian nature, posed a grave threat to free society.⁴¹

The tendency of orthodox historians to describe the superpower conflict as a clash between moral universals had a significant impact on how Soviet motivation was characterized. Good and evil were not only ethical valuations, but state identities, and thus an allegorical lens through which Cold War events could be given meaning. Rooted in a moral equation in which the United States represented good, and the Soviet Union embodied evil, orthodox historians attributed motivation to both superpowers based upon this allegory and interpreted the significance of events accordingly. For orthodox historians who embraced this moralistic reading, discerning the motives underpinning Moscow's diplomatic activity was viewed as relatively unproblematic, despite the lack of

⁴⁰ Zacharias, 82.

⁴¹ Schlesinger, *Vital Center*, 10. See also Stephanson, "Liberty or Death," 84-87.

direct evidence. Intent could be determined by reading Soviet behavior in light of this moral allegory. As the U.S.S.R. was fundamentally evil, its responsibility for instigating and shaping the Cold War was deemed self-evident. The orthodox tendency to lapse into moralism was berated by realists and, later, revisionists, for its inability to explain the complex interests and security concerns of either superpower. Even some traditionalist scholars, such as Adam Ulam, expressed regret over the manner in which the orthodox interpretation represented the superpower struggle as a battle between moral universals. “When it comes to political disasters,” he wrote, “Americans...tend to seek the answer in moral guilt.... [When] the public addressed itself to the question: Who is guilty? It was easy to answer by attributing moral depravity and evil designs to the rulers of the Soviet Union.”⁴²

Related to this allegorical interpretation of the Cold War, many orthodox historians embraced the totalitarian thesis and did not hesitate to draw parallels between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany. According to this argument, the existence of totalitarian domestic structures necessitated a totalitarian foreign policy, the hallmark of which was a need for endless expansion ultimately designed to eradicate “all opposition...anywhere: it means the absorption of all in the central maelstrom of tension.”⁴³ For instance, Chamberlin outlined ten shared characteristics of communism and fascism which suggested a “kinship” between the two political models. Among the features shared by both manifestations of totalitarianism, he claimed, was an ambition for world conquest.⁴⁴ By portraying fascist and communist states as fundamentally similar,

⁴² Adam B. Ulam, *The Rivals: America and Russia Since World War II* (New York: Viking, 1971), 93.

⁴³ Schlesinger, *Vital Center*, 99. See also Burnham, 12.

⁴⁴ Chamberlin, 31-38. Chamberlin identified the ten shared totalitarian characteristics of communism and fascism as: the absolute dictator; the one-party system; the coercion and manipulation of civil society;

traditionalists extrapolated an understanding of Soviet foreign policy that was based on the recent confrontation with Germany. Establishing fascism and communism as driven by a similar set of intentions, orthodox scholars (especially conservatives) argued that any concessions in the face of Russian intransigence was only repeating the mistakes that the western democracies had made by appeasing Hitler.⁴⁵ While primary source documents on the innermost workings of the Soviet government were extremely scarce at the time, Burnham countered that “the lack of adequate direct evidence” on the Kremlin’s diplomatic motives “is more than compensated by what can be indirectly inferred from characteristic features of the Soviet [domestic] system.”⁴⁶ This argument, as subsequent critics have noted, was based on the disputable assumption that a totalitarian state’s external affairs necessarily reflect its domestic organization. Norman Graebner, a realist, wrote critically of the totalitarian thesis: “The existence of internal tyranny, defended with ideological rationalizations, was neither proof of external Soviet expansionism nor necessarily a workable guide to Western policy.”⁴⁷ In contrast to the orthodox view, realists, revisionists, and most post-revisionists contended that the Kremlin’s foreign policy was fundamentally realistic in orientation: regardless of the Soviet Union’s domestic structure, its foreign policy was concerned first and foremost with achieving Russian national security interests.

The treatment of certain types of evidence demonstrates how traditionalists evaluated source material and contended with discrepant information. There were, of

militarism; state-directed economic policies; slave labor; anti-religious fervor; xenophobia; and ambitions of world conquest.

⁴⁵ For example, Bohlen, 102.

⁴⁶ Burnham, 113. Among the domestic features which Burnham identified as reflective of Soviet foreign policy were: the existence of a secret police; the mass purges of dissenters; and the restrictions on freedom of movement.

course, myriad types of public statements made by Soviet officials that diplomatic historians could use, ranging from benevolent proposals for world peace to foreboding predictions of an impending war between the capitalist and communist blocs. To accept every statement, every historical trace, as equally accurate in its representation of Soviet diplomatic intentions would result in a confusing, even incomprehensible, characterization of Soviet motives. Such an understanding of Moscow's activity on the international stage would be next to useless in terms of its explanatory capacity. It was necessary for orthodox historians (and, indeed, scholars from all interpretive schools) to discriminate between different types of statements and determine which types were more appropriate sources for historical inference. In a fashion that was inescapably circular, traditionalist historians (and, again, scholars from all interpretive schools) utilized a presumed hierarchy of motives in order to organize and evaluate the disparate body of potential evidence then available. Those pieces of evidence that accorded with the presumed motives of Soviet foreign policy were ascribed a particularly high truth-value, while evidence that appeared to contradict this characterization was relegated to the realm of deception or delusion. Certain orthodox scholars expressed a degree of bewilderment over whether Soviet diplomats were actually so caught in the thrall of totalitarian ideology that they sincerely believed what they said, or if the statements were misinformation by design. Writing in 1951, Max Beloff pondered "whether Soviet spokesmen really mean what they say, [and] really believe that the rest of the world is the kind of place their speeches would lead one to imagine."⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Norman A. Graebner, *Cold War Diplomacy: American Foreign Policy, 1945-1975* (New York: D. Van Nostrand, 1977), iv.

⁴⁸ Max Beloff, "The Theory of Soviet Foreign Policy," *Soviet Studies* 3, no. 4 (April, 1951), 345.

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⁴⁸ Max Beloff, "The Theory of Soviet Foreign Policy," *Soviet Studies* 3, no. 4 (April, 1951), 345.

Unsurprisingly, the manner in which orthodox historians distinguished truthful sources from deceitful documents paralleled their characterization of Moscow's intentions. In accordance with their hierarchy of motives, orthodox historians favored evidence that was suggestive of the Soviet Union's global ambitions and its totalitarian-ideological fervor. Public statements by communist representatives that espoused peace or cooperation were derided as propagandistic attempts to exploit the world stage for revolutionary purposes. For the Soviet Union, international diplomacy served only as a forum for proselytization and duplicity, in this view. Moscow's participation in international organizations and diplomatic conferences was "a device not for gaining agreement with, but for promoting the destruction of, their [capitalist] fellow-confererees," according to Burnham.⁴⁹ Zacharias similarly described the Soviet Union's "shrewd global peace campaign" of the late 1940s as "propaganda...designed to weaken us [America] through disunity and disarmament" while "the U.S.S.R. is strengthening herself [sic] by lavish and ruthless expenditures on armament."⁵⁰ Conversely, the evidence culled from Soviet press and party speeches, often brimming with Marxist-Leninist references about world revolution and the inevitable triumph of communism, was treated as a clear window into the motives of Soviet foreign policy and consequently assigned a high truth-value. Ideological texts were taken as reflective of Soviet intent, as the undistorted embodiment of Soviet principles.⁵¹ Few attempts were made to engage

⁴⁹ Burnham, 12. See also Schlesinger, *Vital Center*, 135-36. Here, Schlesinger explained that the reason for the the consistent failure of Soviet collaboration with the western democracies was due to their desire to "absorb or destroy" the capitalist nations. As a result, "[n]o co-operation on a common objective is possible because there is no common objective."

⁵⁰ Zacharias, 4.

⁵¹ In a 1971 text, Adam Ulam – himself an orthodox historian – reflected on the orthodox school's treatment of source materials and the possibility that other explanations for Soviet behavior could and did exist in the available evidence: "It is sometimes asserted that Stalin in 1946 reverted to the assertion that eventual war was inevitable in view of the persistence of capitalism. This is not correct. In fact both then

such statements with the same level of doubtful scrutiny that orthodox historians invariably subjected Moscow's calls for world peace and peaceful coexistence.

This methodological pattern suggests how and why the orthodox interpretation tended to ask certain questions of the available evidence and not others, and how these questions were informed by a particular frame of reference that determined in advance the motives which were driving Soviet conduct. For those historians who accepted totalitarian ideology as the *primum mobile* of Soviet action, this characterization guided their use of evidence and provided the framework for distinguishing accurate from inaccurate sources. This interaction between frame of reference and traces of the past was transfigured into a particular understanding of Soviet behavior in the international arena that had a significant impact on the writing of Cold War history. Soviet activity could neither contradict nor transcend the orthodox explanation, which quite successfully explained discrepant behavior as propaganda, duplicity, or empty rhetoric. However, as the realist interpretation illuminated, the orthodox characterization of Soviet intentions did not exhaust interpretation, even if it capably accommodated the available source material and offered plausible explanations for the major events that comprised the early Cold War.

and later the Soviets continued to point out that peaceful coexistence between states with different social systems was possible and desirable." Ulam, 109.

Chapter Two: Realism

Not known for his optimism, Hans J. Morgenthau offered a characteristically negative view of the perspective that a foreign policy – a *good* foreign policy – should adopt in order to effectively deal with the hazards of international relations. “Foreign policy, like all politics,” he cautioned, “is in its essence a struggle for power, waged by sovereign nations for national advantage.... In the life of nations peace is only respite from trouble – or the permanent peace of extinction.”⁵² According to Morgenthau and other realists, the international arena was best served by nations that oriented their respective foreign policies toward the pursuit of carefully-defined national interests relative to the distribution of power in the international system. For a nation to act otherwise, in accordance with ill-defined ideals, was to embrace a foreign policy destined for failure. As Morgenthau and other realist scholars explained, the idealism of U.S. foreign policy during and after the Second World War needlessly aggravated a conflict between the two emerging superpowers, helping produce the tragic circumstances of the Cold War.⁵³

Morgenthau’s realist critique, much like the liberal and conservative interpretations, was predicated on a particular notion of Soviet motivation, which was used to explain the behavior of the communist regime. While realism continued to locate a significant share of responsibility for the Cold War in the Soviet Union’s aggressive expansion, it also advanced a critical analysis of U.S. foreign policy – one that was intimately connected with an alternative understanding of Moscow’s intentions. This

⁵² Hans J. Morgenthau, *In Defense of the National Interest: A Critical Examination of American Foreign Policy* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1951), 92.

critique repudiated the moralism inherent in the traditionalist interpretation and reconceptualized the Cold War as yet another episode in an ongoing cycle of great power conflicts, albeit the first of the nuclear age. Realists rejected the orthodox tendency to comprehend Cold War events as microcosmic clashes between the forces of universal good and universal evil, and reevaluated Soviet behavior on the basis of an explicit body of theory, classical realism. Based on the guiding principles of *realpolitik*, the theory of political realism possessed a long tradition in the realm of statecraft and included such early figures as Thucydides and Machiavelli, and nineteenth century diplomats such as Metternich and Bismarck. Realist historians regarded Soviet foreign policy as following in this tradition, and maintained that recent American behavior contravened the sound advice of traditional diplomacy.⁵⁴ While Stalin pursued Russian national interests according to a rational calculation of the international distribution of power, the United States remained unfocused and overcommitted due to the moralistic and legalistic ideals of its foreign policy.

Much like the liberal and conservative schools, the realist critique developed contemporaneously with the Cold War that it sought to explain. Realist interpretations of the early Cold War were advanced by Walter Lippmann, Hans J. Morgenthau, and George F. Kennan, among others. These major proponents of the realist school often had an uneasy relationship with the U.S. government, for their oft-withering criticism of American idealism and the role that it played in the Cold War conflict received a mixed reception from policy officials. Walter Lippmann was an insightful commentator who strongly criticized U.S. foreign policy, his scathing reproach of containment policy

⁵³ Morgenthau, *National Interest*, 140-42.

⁵⁴ Graebner, *Cold War Diplomacy*, v, 4-5.

proving central to realistic analyses of the Cold War.⁵⁵ George Kennan, former head of the State Department's Policy Planning Staff and the author of the "X" article associated with containment policy, later published numerous books critical of U.S. foreign policy, including the manner in which his "X" article was supposedly misapplied by the government for which he had written it.⁵⁶ Hans Morgenthau published several of his most important texts during the early Cold War period, including *Politics Among Nations* and *In Defense of the National Interest*, both of which clearly spoke to events of the recent past.⁵⁷ Within the United States government, certain policy officials maintained a realist orientation, although they were relatively few in proportion to Wilsonian idealists. The realist school, itself often considered revisionist due to the challenge that it posed to orthodoxy, assumed its most controversial form in the U.S. during the height of domestic unrest in the late 1960s, when it staunchly criticized the strategic value of American involvement in Vietnam.⁵⁸

In Morgenthau's seminal theoretical treatise, *Politics Among Nations*, he described a realistic theory of international relations as rooted in "the concept of interest defined in terms of power." According to this description, sovereign nations competed for the fulfillment of their national interests within an anarchical international environment. The failure of states to operate according to the principles of power would

⁵⁵ Walter Lippmann, *The Cold War: A Study in U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York: Harper, 1947).

⁵⁶ George F. Kennan, *American Diplomacy, 1900-1950* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951); idem., *Russia, The Atom, and the West* (London: Oxford University Press, 1958). Kennan's relationship to realist theory was far from straight-forward, however. See Anders Stephanson, *Kennan and the Art of Foreign Policy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989); Kennan, *Encounters with Kennan: The Great Debate* (London: Frank Cass, 1979), 111-22.

⁵⁷ Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, revised by Kenneth W. Thompson (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1948; brief edition, 1993); idem., *National Interest*.

⁵⁸ For a discussion of the relationship between realist and revisionist interpretations, see Lloyd C. Gardner, "Truman Era Foreign Policy: Recent Historical Trends," in *The Truman Period as a Research Field, A Reappraisal, 1972*, ed. Richard S. Kirkendall (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1974), 51-59.

only intensify the ever-present dangers threatening national survival, realists argued. Moralism, legalism, and utopianism (all of which, realists suggested, were dominant themes in U.S. foreign policy) distracted from the pursuit of national interests, disrupted the existing diplomatic system, and spread a nation's finite capabilities over a wide range of objectives, many of which might be unimportant, if not contrary, to the national interest.⁵⁹ Despite the best intentions of the moralistic-legalistic approach to foreign policy, realists contended, it inevitably caused greater harm in the long run, for it signified an irresponsible policy choice that diverged from the primary task of safeguarding the nation from external threat.⁶⁰

The crux of the realist interpretation was that America's idealistic foreign policy had failed to properly assess the geopolitical situation in Europe at the end of the Second World War and had overcommitted U.S. power in a manner that disregarded and threatened the national interests of the other remaining great power, the Soviet Union. Realist historians maintained that power and security asserted primacy over ideology in the hierarchy of Soviet motives, whereas U.S. foreign policy was confusingly moralistic and legalistic. The idealism inherent in U.S. foreign policy, realists suggested, not only caused it to make commitments which it lacked the necessary power to enforce, but also produced an erroneous view of Soviet behavior. Following their Wilsonian *Weltanschauung*, U.S. policy makers incorrectly regarded Soviet behavior as premised upon totalitarian-ideological motives rather than *realpolitik*. By presuming a different set of intentions for Moscow than what existed in reality, the United States needlessly

⁵⁹ Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, 4-16.

⁶⁰ However, Morgenthau did not deny the usefulness of legalistic-moralistic ideals, provided they were recognized as rhetorical instruments for achieving consensus: "The invocation of abstract moral principles

embarked on an overly ambitious and seemingly interminable conflict that was often beyond the purview of U.S. national interests.⁶¹ Exacerbating the situation was the difficulty that the Kremlin presumably encountered in discerning the true intent behind U.S. public statements. Was the United States prepared to forcibly involve itself in areas outside of its national interest for moralistic-legalistic sentiments? Or were statements to this effect a mere rhetorical cloak designed to appease domestic interest groups? Given this situation, the superpower confrontation was explained by realists as the product, at least in part, of America's failure to play by the rules of the diplomatic game. With two contrary languages at play, realism and idealism, it was inevitable that misunderstandings occurred.

While realists did agree with traditionalists that the Kremlin bore considerable responsibility for instigating the Cold War due to its aggressive and opportunistic expansion, their explanations of its motivation differed significantly.⁶² Unlike the orthodox interpretation, which conceived Soviet conduct as a dangerous abnormality that had to be contained, realist historians downplayed revolutionary ideology and totalitarianism as relevant to Moscow's international ambitions. Rather, ideology served an instrumental purpose for the Kremlin: it increased cohesion in the protective buffer of "satellite" states that comprised the communist bloc, and it mobilized domestic consent

was...a magnificent instrument for marshaling public opinion in support of war and warlike policies – and for losing the peace.” See Morgenthau, *National Interest*, 91-138.

⁶¹ Graebner, *Cold War Diplomacy*, v. Graebner wrote: “the United States pursued long-term goals where neither American power nor even clear American interests were present.”

⁶² Halle noted that “In the Cold War various historical circumstances...put Russia in the role of challenger – superficially, at least, in the role of aggressor. But the historical circumstances...had an ineluctable quality that left the Russians little choice but to move as they did. Moving as they did, they compelled the United States and its allies to move in response. And so the Cold War was joined.” Louis J. Halle, *The Cold War as History* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), xiii. Morgenthau explained that the Soviet role in the Cold War conflict owed to its “cynical disregard for the niceties of diplomatic intercourse” and its “complete unconcern for the sensibilities of the other side.” Morgenthau, *National Interest*, 142-43.

for Soviet policies, particularly the measures taken to divert scarce resources into military and heavy industry sectors. Realist historians emphasized that Moscow was motivated by geopolitically determined national interests, interests which were security oriented and distinctly Russian in nature. These interests predated both Lenin and Stalin and were based on the survival imperative of a nation that had long been subject to invasion, or the threat thereof. Louis Halle argued that Soviet objectives were virtually identical with the Tsarist regime, and that communist ideology played a minimal role in the determination of those objectives. “The behavior of Russia under the communists has been Russian behavior rather than communist behavior,” Halle wrote. “Under the communists, Russia has continued to behave essentially as it behaved under the Tsars.”⁶³

As national security interests were generally fixed over time, and the power capabilities of the Soviet Union were, to some degree, verifiable, realist historians regarded speculation on the relationship between domestic organization and foreign policy to be an unnecessary intellectual exercise. In contrast with the orthodox emphasis upon totalitarianism, the realist school claimed that Moscow’s intentions could be effectively divined by applying the insights of political realism.⁶⁴ This shifted the emphasis to the relationship between the Soviet Union and the geopolitical system of which it was a part. While traditionalist historians regarded Soviet expansion – any Soviet expansion – as a manifestation of its totalitarian impulse and therefore only a first step in its insatiable quest, realists viewed the Soviet territorial increases of 1939-40 and 1944-45 as part of Russia’s historic ambition for national security, and thus limited in

⁶³ Halle, 11.

⁶⁴ Sharp, 71.

scope.⁶⁵ Casting further doubt upon the traditionalist argument, realists claimed that the propensity for Soviet adventurism was further curtailed by the advent of nuclear weaponry. Morgenthau asserted that war no longer accorded with its Clausewitzian definition of politics conducted by other means. War as a rational means to a political end no longer existed. “Today war has become a means of universal destruction to be resorted to only as an act of desperation when all other means of protecting the national interest have failed,” Morgenthau explained. “The restraining influence that...the balance of power exerted upon the policies of ambitious nations in former times is now provided by the fear of the probable consequences of modern war itself.”⁶⁶ For the ever-realistic Soviet Union, the possibility of nuclear war provided further incentive to define and pursue its international objectives with great caution.

While the ominous threat of nuclear destruction implied that great power diplomacy could no longer resort to direct warfare in order to resolve political disputes, the superpower confrontation remained comprehensible in terms of the realist model.⁶⁷ The pursuit of power and the defense of national interests continued unabated. Soviet expansion, linked to traditional Russian security concerns, retained its focus on constructing a security belt comprising Eastern and Central Europe, while preventing the resurgence of a powerful German state capable of resuming its historic *Drang nach Osten*.⁶⁸ Most realist historians expressed considerable doubt that the Soviet Union sought to absorb all of Western Europe into its orbit, for its main objective, primacy in

⁶⁵ Sharp, 71, 73-74.

⁶⁶ Morgenthau, *National Interest*, 163. See also Halle, 8-9.

⁶⁷ Morgenthau, Chapter 3, in Huthmacher and Susman, 81. Morgenthau explained that Cold War origins may be attributed to two factors. First, “the impossibility of peace” owing to the incompatible visions of a postwar world order as championed by each of the superpowers. Second, “the improbability of war” as a result of the onset of the nuclear age.

⁶⁸ Graebner, *Cold War Diplomacy*, 12.

Eastern and much of Central Europe, had largely been fulfilled by the end of the Second World War.⁶⁹

However, the Soviet Union was caught between its realistic quest for national security and the idealistic wartime agreements that it had signed at the behest of its American ally. When the Soviet Union inevitably broke with those agreements, mutual distrust and hostility ensued. Of this problem, Norman Graebner wrote:

Russian vulnerability to penetration from the west...prompted the Kremlin to seek some tangible evidence of victory. Unfortunately, the Soviets could not impose their will on regions subject to their armies without both denying their wartime commitments to self-determination and raising doubts regarding their ultimate intentions.⁷⁰

As realists contended, it was rather absurd of Washington policy makers to demand that their counterparts in the Kremlin follow through on idealistic wartime agreements that took no heed of Russian national interests.⁷¹ In contrast to orthodox historians such as Herbert Feis, who claimed that Soviet violations of Allied wartime agreements were marks of deliberate duplicity,⁷² realist historians remained unsurprised by this behavior and did not read it as indicative of subversive intent. As Morgenthau observed, the U.S.S.R. discarded those agreements that did not suit its interests, and maintained those that did, as was typical of great power behavior.⁷³

⁶⁹ Morgenthau, *National Interest*, 162. See also Graebner, *Cold War Diplomacy*, 18. Graebner wrote: "The Soviet challenge was limited, but the Kremlin's designs on Eastern Europe were unmistakable."

⁷⁰ Graebner, *Cold War Diplomacy*, 4, 10. Morgenthau similarly indicated that Central and Eastern Europe were significant to the maintenance of the balance of power in Europe, which was in the national interest of the United States. He wrote that Soviet Russia's expansion in this area "expressed the traditional national interest of Russia in Europe as clearly as opposition to both of them was required by the traditional American national interest in the maintenance of the European balance of power." Morgenthau, *National Interest*, 108.

⁷¹ Morgenthau, *National Interest*, 145-46.

⁷² Feis, 47.

⁷³ Morgenthau, *National Interest*, 143.

Emerging from the Second World War, Stalin was represented as a hardened practitioner of *realpolitik*.⁷⁴ For a devout realist such as Stalin, adherence to abstract principle was merely a means to an end, and American insistence on the application of moralistic-legalistic policies within what he considered a Soviet sphere of interest raised suspicion. This was not lost upon some U.S. government officials, such as Averell Harriman, who commented in May 1945:

The Russian Premier is a realist in all of his actions, and it is hard for him to appreciate our faith in abstract principle. It is difficult for him to understand why we should want to interfere with Soviet policy in a country [Poland]...which he considers so important to Russia's security unless we have some ulterior motive.⁷⁵

Harriman's view alluded to the spiral of misperception that aggravated the Cold War conflict, as the clashing languages of moral universalism and power politics complicated not only the manner in which states determined their own interests, but how they perceived the activity of other states in the international system.⁷⁶ While Washington could not permit Soviet expansion into Eastern Europe for moral reasons (even though the distribution of power precluded the U.S. from deploying effective counter-force in order to prevent Soviet enlargement), the Kremlin would find legalistic-moralistic guarantees an unacceptable basis for national security.

Realists viewed Soviet bloc relations in a different light than did conservative and liberal historians. Traditionalists tended to accord the communist bloc a centralized character that was held together by ideological illusion and totalitarian coercion. While Morgenthau readily acknowledged that the Soviet Union did install "governments

⁷⁴ Morgenthau, *National Interest*, 97.

⁷⁵ Quoted in Graebner, *Cold War Diplomacy*, 17.

⁷⁶ Kennan, *American Diplomacy*, 95. Kennan wrote that Russian expansionism was aggravated by the legalistic utopianism of the U.S. response, which ran "like a red skein through our foreign policy."

unquestionably subservient to Moscow” in Central and Eastern Europe,⁷⁷ he suggested that it was security interest, rather than ideological solidarity, that provided bloc coherence. Moreover, the security orientation of the communist bloc served the interests of both Russia and the various satellite nations in its orbit; each derived security benefits from the other:

What ties Czechoslovakia and Poland to the Russian chariot is not national sympathy nor is it the affinity of political ideologies. It is the overwhelming power of the Soviet Union, which in its own interest must defend the western frontiers of these two satellites against a Germany allied with the West.⁷⁸

Challenging the view of orthodox historians and politicians, Morgenthau chastised them for adhering to a “conspiratorial interpretation of international politics” that erroneously emphasized an ideologically driven, global communist movement dominated by the Soviet Union. Given the bipolarity of the international system, it was all too easy to accept that “all opposition can be traced to the other center of power, the seat of the worldwide conspiracy.” Morgenthau contended that this notion was seductive in its simplicity, and dangerous in the reinforcement it conferred upon America’s most ambitious Cold War policies. “Such a picture of the political world is not only satisfying to moral pride,” he stated. “Its simplicity is also a boon to understanding. It saves us the trouble of probing into the complexities and ambiguities of any specific adversity and opposition.”⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Morgenthau, *National Interest*, 105.

⁷⁸ Morgenthau, *National Interest*, 197. Morgenthau conjectured that, in the case of resurgent German aggression, “Stalin would not hesitate to do what the Czars did time and again, and what he himself did once before: sacrifice the interests of Poland on the altar of Russo-German friendship.”

⁷⁹ Morgenthau, *National Interest*, 94. The trenchant critique of containment policy by realist historians provided an example of how the different characterization of Soviet intentions was linked to the prudence (or lack thereof) of particular policy decisions by the United States. See Lippmann; Kennan, *American Diplomacy*, 93, 102-03; Morgenthau, *National Interest*, 114-16; Graebner, *Cold War Diplomacy*, 39.

The paucity of direct evidence on the internal operation of the Soviet government was of minimal concern to diplomatic historians of a realist persuasion. In fact, if a particular theory could be said to have been pre-designed to circumvent the problems posed by the inaccessibility of Soviet archives, it was realism. State behavior, provided it was realistic, was motivated by the pursuit of national interests, which were generally security-oriented and fixed over time. And, according to the realist interpretation, Soviet behavior was unmistakably realistic. Graebner described the Soviet Union as “essentially a powerful nation pursuing traditional policies designed to secure a maximum of security against one or more proven antagonists....Soviet policy was circumscribed by the concrete factors of power politics and national interest.”⁸⁰ Given this characterization, it was logical to expect the insights of realist theory to hold true in the illumination of the Kremlin’s intentions. The lack of direct evidence on the inner workings of the Soviet government, which so perplexed other historians looking to support their interpretations, was only a minor concern for realists. By the very nature of the theory, state motivation was already regarded as a “black box,” regardless of available source documentation. As a result, realist historians tended to avoid speculation about the connection between domestic organization and foreign policy, and instead characterized Soviet foreign policy as an instrument in pursuit of Russia’s historic security interests.⁸¹ This seemed to accord realists a clear advantage: they could claim that their analyses avoided rampant speculation in favor of a clear and rational appraisal of state behavior based on traditional national security interests and power realities. Factors associated with internal pressures could be largely disregarded; the Soviet Union either had sufficient power to achieve its

⁸⁰ Graebner, ed., *The Cold War*, vii.

(more properly, Russian) national interests, or it did not. Anything beyond that merely confounded analysis.

One of the most frequent analytical assumptions of the realist interpretation was that the Soviet Union defined and pursued its national interests in the manner delineated by the axioms of political realism. Critics of realism noted that the concept of “national interest,” and its use in statecraft, was far more pliant than generally assumed. While most realist historians appealed to this concept as objectively apprehendable, its malleability was rarely explored, at least within the discipline of diplomatic history.⁸² As Arnold Wolfers argued in an important critique of realism, the concept of national interest “may not have any precise meaning at all.”⁸³ The reason, Wolfers argued, was that definitions of national security are inherently subjective, often involving interests that stretch far beyond the defense of sovereign territory and core values that realists typically ascribed to the term. In fact, the desire for national security

is a function not merely of the will of others, real or imagined, to destroy the nation’s independence but of national desires and ambitions to retain a wealth of other values such as rank, respect, material possessions and special privileges. It would seem to be a fair guess that the efforts for security by a particular nation will tend to vary, other things being equal, with the range of values for which protection is being sought.⁸⁴

According to Wolfers’ argument, definitions of national security hinged upon a subjective perception of possible threats, intermingled with definitions of “core values” that were also possessed of considerable elasticity.

⁸¹ For a discussion of why political realism eschews analysis of domestic motivating factors, see Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, 5-6.

⁸² For an example of how realists treated the national interest as a principle capable of being objectively apprehended, see Kennan, *American Diplomacy*, 102-03.

⁸³ Arnold Wolfers, “‘National Security’ as an Ambiguous Symbol,” in *Classics of International Relations*, ed. John A. Vasquez, 3rd edition (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1996), 150-56. Citation from 150. First published in *Political Science Quarterly* 67 (December 1952): 481-502.

⁸⁴ Wolfers, 151-52.

Wolfers' critique of the presumed objectivity, rationality, and stability of national interests brings to light one of the assumptions that enabled realist historians to imbue the Soviet Union with a particular set of intentions. By denying the influence of ideology, and maintaining the primacy of national security in the operation of Soviet foreign policy, realist historians extrapolated a series of assumptions about its motivation from a theory that was far from conceptually precise. While realist historians contended that Russia had no motive for expanding into Western Europe, and based their historical interpretations upon this assumption, they could offer no firm evidence capable of refuting orthodox claims to the contrary.

Much of this disagreement may be traced to deep-rooted differences between the orthodox and realist schools over the Soviet hierarchy of motives. Orthodox historians characterized the Soviet Union as an "abnormal" state that was following through on its totalitarian-ideological impulses. While orthodox historians did not deny that Stalin might have taken Eastern and Central Europe for security reasons, they inferred from the very nature of the Soviet state that this was only the first step in a plot for world conquest. In contrast, realist historians characterized the Soviet Union as a "normal" state, in that it pursued a realistic foreign policy which gave primary place to Moscow's limited security concerns.⁸⁵ As ideology possessed a low ranking in the hierarchy of Soviet foreign policy motives favored by realists, the presence of Marxist-Leninist language in diplomatic statements was not accorded a high truth-value, but explained as rhetoric or duplicity. For communist leaders, Robert Daniels argued,

Theory is utilized by the communist leadership to justify their power and policies, and its meaning is periodically reinterpreted to this end....It has served them

⁸⁵ For example, Sharp, 73.

solely as a fount of righteousness and a store of quotations which could make hastily improvised policies look like doctrinal obligations.⁸⁶

Diplomatic historians were thus faced with an interpretive quandary: the limited amounts of available evidence, as well as the actual events that comprised the early Cold War, supported both traditionalist *and* realist characterizations of Soviet motives. The preponderance of evidence and the nature of events could be plausibly explained by both interpretations, and there was no reason to choose one over the other based solely upon methodological grounds. How, then, did diplomatic historians decide which interpretation to favor? Two areas of historical discourse that were characterized by particularly passionate exchanges, and which seemingly offered some basis for choosing between the divergent interpretations, were the moral nature of the conflict and the question of what the United States *should* have done in order to better match its policy to Soviet motives.

Importantly, realists tended to avoid the moralistic good/evil opposition that was supposedly so prevalent in many of the United States' political and diplomatic considerations. While realists were deeply perturbed by the domestic activities of the Soviet Union, they refused to let this moral disapprobation spill over into their interpretative framework. Morgenthau described how the flaw of reading the superpower conflict, and particularly U.S. foreign policy, as intrinsically moral could produce troubling results:

It is difficult for the United States to understand that other nations, in opposing American policies, may pursue their national interests, as legitimate as those which the United States denies pursuing but actually pursues just the same....Since American foreign policy is by definition selfless and moral, the foreign policy of nations opposing it are by definition selfish and immoral. Since

⁸⁶ Robert V. Daniels, "What the Russians Mean," in *The Cold War*, ed. Graebner, 59-61. First published in *Commentary* XXXIV (October, 1962), 314-323.

the United States is the policeman of the world seeking only peace and order and the welfare of all, only evil nations can dare oppose it.⁸⁷

While Washington apparently predicated its early Cold War foreign policy on this assumption, and orthodox historians reconstructed the superpower conflict according to this logic, realism attempted to distance itself from reading state identities and intentions in light of any moral equation. Of course, realism was deeply moral in its own right, although not in the same sense as orthodox historians. Rather, realist scholars focused on the deeper moral opprobrium that could emerge (and, they argued, was then emerging) from a conflict exacerbated by the legalistic-moralistic principles that the U.S. espoused. With bitter irony, Kennan declared that “the legalistic approach to world affairs, rooted as it unquestionably is in a desire to do away with war and violence, makes violence more enduring, more terrible, and more destructive to political stability than did the older motives of national interest.”⁸⁸ Morgenthau noted his own deep-felt sense that “many of the uses to which the Russians have put their power are obnoxious in the moral sense,” yet he also recognized an “immeasurably greater” tribulation originating in America’s confusion of universal ideals with particular national interests.⁸⁹

In much the same manner as the other interpretive schools, realist historians engaged in a mixture of historical reconstruction and suggestive critique oriented towards future policy decisions. The narrative of the early Cold War that realist historians advanced differed significantly from the orthodox narrative on numerous issues, including the characterization of Moscow’s foreign policy. According to the realist

⁸⁷ Morgenthau, *National Interest*, 93.

⁸⁸ Kennan, *American Diplomacy*, 100-01.

⁸⁹ Morgenthau, *National Interest*, 136. On the moral nature of Morgenthau’s realism, see A.J.H. Murray, “The Moral Politics of Hans Morgenthau,” *The Review of Politics* 58, no. 1 (1996): 81-107; Benjamin Wong, “Hans Morgenthau’s Anti-Machiavellian Machiavellianism,” *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 29, no. 2 (2000): 389-409.

critique, the idealism of American foreign policy inclined U.S. officials to misconstrue the Soviet threat and formulate an impractical policy response. By redefining the Soviet threat on the basis of *realpolitik*, the implication was that the postwar conflict between Moscow and Washington could have been ameliorated through traditional diplomacy, rather than containment. As G. Thomas Goodnight observed in an analysis of Morgenthau's *In Defense of the National Interest*, "realism contests with, even as it depicts, the realities of a time."⁹⁰ This involved a threefold rhetorical strategy by which the past was interconnected with the present and the future. In Goodnight's analysis, Morgenthau first "moved to recover exemplars of effective [diplomatic] practice" in the past, then "defined the present contexts of choice" on the basis of the model that he constructed, and ultimately "weighed orientations seeking to encumber the future," particularly idealism.⁹¹ Thus, a particular way of evaluating past U.S. policy, based (in part) upon a particular understanding of Soviet motivation, produced certain historical lessons that suggested recommendations for improved policy in the future.

The realists were extremely critical of American foreign policy as it was formulated during the late 1940s: the naïve idealism of U.S. officials led to the development of unrealistic initiatives that were predicated upon an erroneous conception of Soviet motives. In his critique of Kennan's article, "The Sources of Soviet Conduct" (published in the July 1947 issue of *Foreign Affairs* under the pseudonym of "Mr. X," and generally accepted as the founding document for the policy of containment), Walter

⁹⁰ G. Thomas Goodnight, "Hans J. Morgenthau *In Defense of the National Interest*: On Rhetoric, Realism, and the Public Sphere," in *Post-Realism: The Rhetorical Turn in International Relations*, Francis A. Beer and Robert Hariman, eds. (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1996), 150.

⁹¹ Goodnight, 146.

Lippmann articulated precisely how a flawed view of Soviet intent produced a flawed policy response by the United States:

Having become exclusively preoccupied with the Marxian ideology...it is no wonder that the outcome of Mr. X's analysis is nothing more definite, concrete, or practical than that the Soviets will encroach and expand 'at a series of constantly shifting geographical and political points.' Mr. X's picture of the Soviet conduct has no pattern. It is amorphous. That is why his conclusions about how we should deal with the Soviets have no pattern, and are also amorphous.⁹²

As a result, Lippmann maintained at the end of his famous critique that "underlying all the ideas of the Truman Doctrine there is a disbelief in the possibility of a settlement of the issues raised by this war....The conclusion [has been reached] that all we can do is to 'contain' Russia until Russia changes."⁹³ However, a more accurate comprehension of Soviet motives, predicated upon the notion that the Kremlin operated in accordance with *realpolitik*, could allow for a diplomatic settlement and an end to the Cold War tragedy. In order to achieve this greater good, most realist historians argued, the United States should have embarked on the task of securing a negotiated settlement with Russia, one that involved "the recognition of the limits of the mutual interests and power" of the great powers, rather than indulging in universalist aspirations.⁹⁴

However, this policy recommendation was predicated upon a notion of Soviet identity that was itself highly speculative, and open to considerable debate. Was the Soviet Union operating in a consistently realistic manner? Was the Kremlin's definition of its national interest in accordance with realist axioms or, if not, were these supposed miscalculations the product of Marxist-Leninist ideology? Furthermore, how seriously

⁹² Lippmann, 31.

⁹³ Lippmann, 60.

⁹⁴ Morgenthau argued that international agreements were "not an embrace between virtue and vice in which virtue must perish," but an instrument for securing peace by articulating and balancing interests. See Morgenthau, *National Interest*, 136. See also Graebner, *Cold War Diplomacy*, 58-59; Kennan, *American Diplomacy*, 98; Lippmann, 60-62.

did the Soviet Union take America's anti-communist threats and apparent disregard for traditional spheres of interest, and to what extent did this affect Moscow's strategic calculations? As with orthodoxy, assumptions about Soviet identity were built into the realist interpretation of the past, often without a full consideration of the problems involved in writing about Soviet behavior. Indeed, many of the ambiguities in realist thinking would be played upon by the revisionist school, as it advanced an apparently dramatic inversion of the traditional Western narrative of the early Cold War.

Chapter Three: Revisionism

At the heart of the historiographical controversy surrounding the Cold War was the revisionist interpretation. While diplomatic historians had been expressing alternative interpretations of the early Cold War prior to the 1960s, it was during that turbulent decade that doubts about U.S. foreign affairs led to the inception of an historiographical school that challenged not only the prudence of Washington's policies as formulated in the early Cold War period, but also the sincerity of purpose underlying those initiatives.⁹⁵ At the center of the revisionist challenge was the notion that a significant gap existed between the stated intent of American foreign policy and the objectives which were actually pursued. While orthodox historians claimed that U.S. Cold War policy was designed to protect democracy from the related threats of communism and totalitarianism, revisionists countered that the Soviet threat had been inflated in order to serve as a smokescreen for America's expansive economic self-interest. The failure of orthodox historians to seize upon this disparity, revisionists argued, resulted in narratives which uncritically reproduced Washington's official line on the nature of Soviet motivation without scrutinizing the deeper political and economic interests that American policies might have served.

While revisionists tended to focus upon U.S. foreign policy, the nature of Soviet foreign policy motivation remained of central importance to their arguments. The motivation for Moscow's seemingly aggressive behavior on the international stage was not the totalitarian-ideological urge for expansion, but rather the realistic pursuit of

⁹⁵ For a discussion of the relationship between domestic discord and the rise of Cold War revisionism see David Horowitz, *The Free World Colossus: A Critique of American Foreign Policy in the Cold War* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1965; revised, 1971), 3-7.

Russian national interests, revisionists countered. The Kremlin, in this view, was compelled to expand in order to achieve a set of security objectives which were relatively fixed over time regardless of the political system then in place. Joyce and Gabriel Kolko argued that, by the very nature of its war-ravaged economy, Soviet foreign policy was oriented toward national security and accommodation with the West.⁹⁶ Far from the rabidly expansionistic nation of communist ideologues that orthodox historians depicted, revisionists claimed that the Soviet Union was moderate in its aims and cautious in its actions. Moreover, it was Moscow's fear of and response to external danger that prompted the brutal Sovietization of neighboring states in order to more effectively shield Russia from military or economic penetration.⁹⁷

In its representation of the Soviet Union as security-minded and limited in its expansionist aspirations, revisionism shared much with the realist interpretation.⁹⁸ However, while revisionists concurred with the realist argument that Moscow's foreign policy was driven by the pursuit of Russian national interests, they departed from their colleagues over *why* the Soviet Union was expanding. While realists emphasized the power imbalance on the European continent and how this situation inclined the Soviet Union to engage in the strategic aggrandizement typical of any great power, revisionists claimed that Soviet expansion was better explained as the defensive maneuvers of a weak

⁹⁶ Joyce and Gabriel Kolko, *The Limits of Power: The World and United States Foreign Policy, 1945-1954* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), 55.

⁹⁷ Walter LaFeber, *America, Russia, and the Cold War*, 2nd edition (New York: John Wiley, 1972), 17-18; Paterson, *Meeting the Communist Threat*, 132; William Appleman Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy* (New York: World Publishing, 1959), 155.

⁹⁸ Walter Lippmann was particularly significant to revisionists. See Horowitz, 19, where he wrote "if...Lippmann's strategic policy recommendations had been adopted by Washington as an alternative to containment, it is certain...that Europe would not be divided today." Joyce and Gabriel Kolko suggested that Soviet intentions in the 1945-47 period were a "curious admixture of naïveté and realism" (57). See also Williams, *Tragedy*, 19; Gar Alperovitz, *Atomic Diplomacy: Hiroshima and Potsdam* (New York: Penguin, 1965, revised, 1985), 56-57, 328-38.

nation attempting to protect itself from the looming peril of a zealously anticommunist United States at the apex of its strength relative to other nations. In the revisionist view, the motives for U.S. foreign policy were far more insidious than the naïve idealism typically ascribed to it by the realists: Washington's bullying diplomatic conduct toward the weaker Soviet Union was the product of the American desire for constant economic expansion into new markets. Central to the operation of American foreign policy, in this view, was the ideology of the Open Door, which, according to William Appleman Williams, involved the "idea that America's economic system had to have a constantly expanding foreign market if it was to survive and prosper."⁹⁹ Gabriel and Joyce Kolko also linked the construction of the communist menace to the United States' domestic economy, noting that the real issue in determining U.S. foreign policy was "not the containment of communism, but rather...the extension and expansion of American capitalism according to its new economic power and needs."¹⁰⁰ Moreover, they suggested that "the United States was again and again to use Russia to justify its efforts to attain its larger economic and political goals, objectives that would have existed even without a Communist Russia."¹⁰¹ In revisionist narratives, then, the traditional relationship between the superpowers was inverted. America was no longer responding to an external threat, and the Soviet Union was no longer expanding in accordance with the dread logic of its totalitarian system. Rather, America's domestic economy inclined the capitalist superpower to seek new markets abroad while the Soviet Union merely responded to this external threat.

⁹⁹ Williams, *Tragedy*, 156.

¹⁰⁰ Kolko, 23.

¹⁰¹ Kolko, 53.

In the face of unbridled American expansion, the Soviet Union assumed a reactive role in revisionist narratives. In order to explain the Kremlin's role in this dramatic reinterpretation of superpower relations, revisionists stressed two related ways in which traditionalists mistook the Soviet threat. First, revisionists rebutted the orthodox assumption that the Soviet Union possessed sufficient power to threaten war-ravaged Europe. David Horowitz suggested that "the Kremlin rulers, *whatever their long-range intentions*, were bound by the...imbalance of power [relative to the United States] to make moves of primarily *tactical* significance."¹⁰² Second, and following from the first, revisionists claimed that the Soviet Union was realistic in policy orientation, such that its objectives were cautiously defined and accorded with the means at its disposal. For the Kolkos, the realities of power and interest "would determine whether Russia would be passive or aggressive in global affairs."¹⁰³ Unlike the realist interpretation, which considered power and interest largely in terms of geopolitics, revisionists added an economic dimension to their analyses. The Kolkos argued that the diplomatic intentions of a given state were a reflection of its "economic power structure," which produced certain "objective needs" that the ruling class(es) attempted to fulfill in order to perpetuate their dominance.¹⁰⁴ Thus, the intentions of a state's foreign policy could be inferred through an analysis of its economic infrastructure. On this basis, the United States could be portrayed as innately expansionistic and imperialistic by virtue of capitalism's need for new markets, while the Soviet Union could be represented as content with the fundamentally realistic task of securing its borders, for it lacked the

¹⁰² Horowitz, 18-19. Author's emphasis. In contrast with the Soviet Union's inability to commit any more than *tactical* moves on the world stage, the author maintained that "the early postwar situation was such as to give the United States a near monopoly on the *strategic* decisions which would determine the structure of international relations in the postwar period."

profit motive of a capitalist economy. Consequently, revisionists maintained that the U.S.S.R. lacked both the power and the desire to expand in the manner that orthodox scholars postulated; it was the external threats to the national survival of the Soviet Union that provided the explanatory context for Moscow's international behavior.¹⁰⁵ Even those limited security objectives, minor next to the grandiose ambitions that orthodox historians accused the Kremlin of harboring, were difficult to obtain given the U.S.S.R.'s extremely weak power capabilities in conjunction with American intransigence. As a result, the Soviet Union tended to get the benefit of the doubt in revisionist narratives, as Geir Lundestad critically noted. "Revisionists," he observed, "have not found it difficult to allow that the Soviets had certain needs from the point of view of security. The same factor can hardly be said to exist in their writings as a motive for American policies."¹⁰⁶

In order to sustain a characterization of Soviet motives that privileged *realpolitik* over Marxism-Leninism, revisionists adopted certain methodological strategies in order to explain the role (or lack thereof) of communist ideology in the Kremlin's policy formulation. Following the realist interpretation, revisionists subordinated communist ideology to Russian national interests in the hierarchy of factors motivating the Kremlin's behavior. The main purpose of Marxist-Leninism, in this view, was that of a "doctrinally opportunist" rhetorical instrument that Moscow used in order to cloak the narrow pursuit of Russian national interests behind a veil of moral universalism. Far from being slavishly beholden to a mechanistic ideology, the Soviet's use of Marxist-Leninist

¹⁰³ Kolko, 53.

¹⁰⁴ Kolko, 19.

¹⁰⁵ The Kolkos regarded Soviet foreign policy as severely constrained by domestic pressures for economic reconstruction: "The Russian people were war-weary and anxious to rebuild," which placed "grave limits...on an active foreign policy" (54).

¹⁰⁶ Geir Lundestad, *The American Non-Policy Towards Eastern Europe, 1943-1947* (New York: Humanities Press, 1975), 417-18.

doctrine was, revisionists claimed, “always conditioned by the primary desire to survive in what has usually been an unfavorable internal and global situation.”¹⁰⁷ The Soviet dictator, in this view, was far from the revolutionary romantic depicted by orthodox historians, nor was he analogous to his purported totalitarian peer, Adolf Hitler.¹⁰⁸ Stalin was represented as a calculating practitioner of *realpolitik*, who was much more concerned with national survival than engaging in unnecessary adventures abroad.¹⁰⁹ According to this description, Stalin’s short-term actions were informed by a non-confrontational pragmatism, and his revolutionary internationalism, if it did exist as anything more than a distant daydream, was extremely gradualist in nature.¹¹⁰

In terms of Soviet expansion and communist bloc relations, revisionists generally indicated that the Soviet Union, beyond obtaining its security needs, was not subject to an insatiable compulsion for territorial aggrandizement. Indeed, its influence upon satellite nations could have been far less brutal and centralized had there not been the persistent American threats of economic and military penetration.¹¹¹ In support of this notion, revisionists cited the ad hoc nature of Soviet administration in the occupied territories of Eastern Europe, which traditional accounts tended to overlook. From relatively unfettered elections in Hungary, to Stalin’s refusal to aid local communists embroiled in the Greek Civil War, to the immediate installation of communist regimes in Rumania and Poland, the consistent pattern of Soviet occupation that orthodox historians postulated did not seem to exist.¹¹² Noting that traditionalists focused on the “brutal period” of hardline Soviet administration that effectively began in 1947 while skimming the more flexible

¹⁰⁷ Kolko, 56. See also LaFeber, 14.

¹⁰⁸ Williams, *Tragedy*, 195.

¹⁰⁹ Horowitz, 86-88. See also Kolko, 54-55; Alperovitz, 338.

¹¹⁰ Williams, *Tragedy*, 155; Horowitz, 79fn.

aspects of Soviet policy in 1945 and 1946, Gar Alperovitz charged those scholars with neglecting events that contradicted their view of Soviet motivation.¹¹³

Again, two divergent characterizations of Soviet motivation were in operation, causing much interpretive strife. While orthodox historians favored the totalitarian-ideological explanation of Soviet motives and understood any territorial aggrandizement as part of a plan for endless conquest, revisionist historians favored the *realpolitik* explanation and understood Soviet expansion as in keeping with Russia's security requirements, and thus limited in scope. While the orthodox historian Arthur Schlesinger could dismiss the seemingly haphazard nature of Soviet activity in Eastern Europe in 1945 and 1946 as a case of Stalin "still for a moment experimenting with techniques of control"¹¹⁴ in the service of more grandiose totalitarian-ideological ambitions, revisionists took these events as a sign of Moscow's flexibility and pragmatic realism. As the Kolkos wrote, beyond the Kremlin's "initial insistence that Eastern Europe not be returned to those elements that had been instrumental in the creation of the *cordon sanitaire* [during the interwar years], their laxity until 1947 in consolidating power along their borders revealed a fundamental desire to avoid unnecessarily offending the West."¹¹⁵ Meaning was thus conferred upon events based upon the hierarchy of motives favored by a particular interpretive school.

Given the multiple characterizations of Soviet motivation now competing for academic favor, it was perhaps inevitable that focus would turn to the use and abuse of the expanding documentary record. Different views on the nature of Soviet intent

¹¹¹ Alperovitz, 328-38.

¹¹² Horowitz, 26-27.

¹¹³ Alperovitz, 338.

¹¹⁴ Schlesinger, in Huthmacher and Susman, 75.

contributed to divergent readings of the available evidence in a manner that exasperated historians on either side of the interpretive fence. Each interpretive school claimed that its respective competitors took excessive liberties with “the facts” in order to support their views. Often, such challenges involved fundamental differences over the relationship between the evidence then available and the accepted characterization of Moscow’s motives, or, perhaps more appropriately, how the accepted characterization of Moscow’s motives came to shape the interpretation of source material. Robert Maddox chastised revisionist historians for reading their own understanding of Soviet motives into the evidence: “Without hesitation,” he claimed, revisionists “have pronounced as ‘frank’ or ‘sincere’ statements of [Stalin’s] about which nothing more is known than that he made them.”¹¹⁶ The crux of the matter, apparently, was that revisionists assigned truth-value to the available evidence in a manner that starkly contravened orthodox arguments about Soviet motivation. The charge cut both ways, however. William Appleman Williams took issue with the traditionalist assumption that Stalin’s paranoia significantly affected Soviet foreign policy, observing that the “evidence does not support that interpretation.” He expressed incredulity over the manner in which orthodox historians “came by the power to render such flat-out psychiatric judgments” about Stalin’s presumed psychosis “without professional training and without direct access to their subject.”¹¹⁷ In both cases, historians claimed that there was an absence of evidence to support the opposing view although, curiously enough, both could also cite examples in support of their respective positions.

¹¹⁵ Kolko, 715.

¹¹⁶ Maddox, 9.

The manner in which revisionists assigned truth-value to the different sources had been advanced in similar form by realists since the late 1940s. In order to explain Soviet-American relations, revisionists adhered to a particular view of the nature of the diplomatic record and how to accurately infer meaning from it. In a manner reminiscent of realism, revisionists placed considerable skepticism in the truth-value of public diplomacy. Revisionists suggested that there was a more fundamental truth that was not always explicit in the documentary record.¹¹⁸ This truth cut through the rhetoric that politicians used in order to “sell” policy and penetrated to the very core of diplomacy – power and interests. As the Kolkos wrote:

Diplomacy is a complex ritual, often scarcely more than a stratagem preceding haggling and trading akin to a bazaar. Power...and the advancement of state goals are the real world in which the great nations operate. Words at formal diplomatic conferences are uttered to conceal real meanings.¹¹⁹

Appealing to this deeper truth implicit in the documents produced its own methods for handling source material, methods which inevitably harmonized with an accepted characterization of Soviet motives. To a great extent, then, it was decided in advance what was truthful, and what was little more than political posturing. As orthodox historians invested ideological statements made by Kremlin officials with greater truth-value than Moscow’s professions of its limited security objectives, similarly revisionist (and realist) historians inverted the truth-value accorded to these different types of statements. As such, it was relatively easy to defend a given interpretation from competing claims by casting doubt upon the meaningfulness of those documents

¹¹⁷ Williams, “American Innocence Questioned,” in *The Origins of the Cold War*, ed. Paterson, 2nd edition, (Lexington: D.C. Heath, 1974), 225. First published as “The Cold War Revisionists,” *The Nation* 205 (November 13, 1967), 492-95.

¹¹⁸ Frank Ninkovich, “Interests and Discourse in Diplomatic History,” *Diplomatic History* 13 (Spring 1989), 142-43, 148.

¹¹⁹ Kolko, 36.

privileged by an opposing interpretive school. This was not a phenomenon peculiar to revisionism, although it was especially evident in their stark reworking of the traditional Cold War narrative.

The manner in which source documents were evaluated had a significant impact on how revisionists, much like orthodox and realist historians, supported their arguments. Characterizing Soviet motivation as defensive and moderate, revisionists tended to attribute a higher truth-value to those statements which accorded with this view, while discounting contradictory evidence. In sharp distinction to orthodox views, which stressed the more belligerent and ideological Soviet pronouncements, revisionists emphasized the frequent calls for peaceful coexistence made by Soviet officials. For instance, the Kolkos claimed that:

The dominant theme in Soviet proclamations on international affairs in the three years after the war was the possibility and likelihood of coexistence and peace between Russia and the West, and Soviet writers produced a rather elaborate ideological superstructure to give a 'Marxist' justification to this notion.¹²⁰

It is clear, however, that both aggressive and defensive themes could be teased out of the available evidence on Soviet motivation; indeed, often out of the same body of evidence. For instance, debate over a controversial February 1946 speech delivered by Stalin suggested how different views of Soviet motives impinged upon the interpretation of documents and events. For orthodox historians, this speech seemingly restored the idea of an inevitable war between capitalist and communist nations to the center of diplomatic thinking in the communist world. In contrast, the Kolkos suggested that Stalin's speech only "dimly implied that any future conflicts would be between capitalist nations

¹²⁰ Kolko, 56.

quarreling over raw materials and spheres of influence.”¹²¹ Likewise, in the debate over the sincerity of Soviet interest in the Marshall Plan, revisionists argued that Stalin was genuinely eager to participate, although the anti-Soviet aspects of the European Recovery Program left the Soviets with no other option except outright rejection. The revisionist view contrasted with the orthodox argument that the Soviet Union was unwilling to participate in the Marshall Plan for reasons of ideological necessity.¹²² Again, the revisionist interpretation was related to a particular characterization of Soviet intent. An “instinct of survival, based on caution” was assumed to be at the heart of Soviet motivation, and the sincerity of its interest in the Marshall Plan was rooted in this understanding, as was its eventual decision to eschew involvement.¹²³

Revisionism was frequently accused of allowing its dissatisfaction with contemporary American diplomacy to shape its inquiry into the past. Accusations of presentism were most often formulated as rhetorical strategies designed to denigrate revisionist history as subjectivist, while implying that other interpretations were more objective and thus more truthful.¹²⁴ Observing that the revisionist school “coincided with the growth of public opposition to the Vietnam war,” John Lewis Gaddis chided it for “simply respond[ing], as if by reflex, to the changing ideological fashions of the day.”¹²⁵ Most revisionists conceded that their analyses of the past pointed to patterns that were applicable to present concerns. But Lloyd Gardner, countering the pejorative representation of revisionism as “presentist” and “subjective,” noted that “there has never been a time when the nation’s political consciousness was separate from and apart from

¹²¹ Kolko, 57.

¹²² Feis, 248.

¹²³ Kolko, 58. On Russian concerns over the requirements made by the Marshall Plan, see LaFeber, 60-61.

¹²⁴ For example, Robert H. Ferrell, “Truman Foreign Policy: A Traditionalist View,” in Kirkendall, 17.

its historical consciousness. It won't do to try to explain away revisionism on these grounds, unless one is prepared to do the same for other interpretations."¹²⁶ For Williams, his advocacy of a re-assessment of United States' foreign policy was intrinsically linked to the manner in which he wrote diplomatic history. Williams made it clear that his goal was not to champion the Soviet Union, for which he was so frequently accused, but to continue in the Progressivist tradition of urging America to better approximate its own idealized self-image.¹²⁷ In order to make this argument, however, a particular characterization of the Soviet Union had to be advanced against which American policy initiatives were measured. By demonstrating that American officials had, consciously or not, misapprehended the Soviet threat, the floodgates could then be opened to criticism of the policies predicated on that erroneous conceptualization.

During those crucial early years of the Cold War, according to revisionists, the United States' desire for economic expansion produced conflict with the U.S.S.R., which perceived its communist system threatened by capitalist encroachment. Moscow's apprehension seemed justified given the United States' unwillingness to recognize Soviet national interests. Williams, along with other revisionists, expressed his belief that the United States had missed its opportunity to negotiate effectively and fairly with its erstwhile ally in the immediate postwar period, thus leading to the tragic circumstances of the Cold War. U.S. policy makers opted instead to exploit the fear of communism and totalitarianism as a smokescreen behind which it instituted a highly ambitious program

¹²⁵ John Lewis Gaddis, "The Emerging Post-Revisionist Synthesis on the Origins of the Cold War," *Diplomatic History* 7 (Summer 1983), 172, 189.

¹²⁶ Gardner, "Truman Era Foreign Policy," 48.

¹²⁷ "In the most fundamental sense," Williams wrote, "the present crisis in American diplomacy is defined by the conflict within and between America's ideals and practice." Williams, *Tragedy*, 13.

for shaping the global economy in America's favor.¹²⁸ While the revisionist arguments about the United States' ulterior economic motives and the Soviet Union's defensive security concerns were roundly condemned by traditionalist scholars during the late 1960s, the introduction of these views had a significant impact on the historiography. Diplomatic historians of a more orthodox stripe may have disagreed with revisionism's conclusions, yet many conceded the need to address the pressures that the United States consciously exerted on the Soviet Union and the manner in which Moscow's interests were threatened as a result. This attempt to synthesize orthodox and revisionist methods took root in the post-revisionist interpretive school, which rose to prominence in the *détente* years of the early 1970s.

¹²⁸ Williams, *Tragedy*, 19.

Chapter Four: Post-Revisionism

Post-revisionism emerged during the détente years of the Cold War and was characterized by its desire to transcend the orthodox-revisionist controversy.¹²⁹ The catalyst for the post-revisionist project was a general feeling of dissatisfaction with the manner in which debate had been polarized and interpretation constrained.¹³⁰ As a result, post-revisionism set itself the task of evaluating the arguments and conclusions of orthodoxy, realism, and revisionism, and measuring their accuracy against the new evidence which was then emerging from recently-declassified Western archives.¹³¹ Like an array of ingredients for which no recipe was available, post-revisionist historians experimented with different combinations of the various interpretations, searching for what they felt was a truthful and accurate account, albeit one that necessarily remained deficient in one major ingredient, Soviet sources.¹³² Still, sufficient ingredients were available to make for what post-revisionists considered a palatable meal, and in some cases even an authoritative recipe.

¹²⁹ Post-revisionism may be construed in both a broad and a narrow sense. In the broad sense, it signifies a disparate group of historians that attempted to forge a common ground between orthodox and revisionist positions. Considered narrowly, it signifies a particular interpretation championed by John Lewis Gaddis, which leans to the center-right of the political spectrum and tends to favor moderate orthodox conclusions. For the purposes of this study, post-revisionism will be considered in the broad sense, thus including several historians who have disassociated themselves from post-revisionism in its narrow sense.

¹³⁰ The orthodox-revisionist dispute was described by Daniel Yergin as “a continuation of the Cold War by other means,” rightly implying that historians were divided into two mutually-antagonistic camps (or, in this case, schools of interpretation), each prone to read something sinister into the other. Yergin, *Shattered Peace: The Origins of the Cold War and the National Security State* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977), 6-7. Mastny described the existing historiography in a similar fashion when he noted that many of the attempts to reconstruct the historical origins of the Cold War were “shots in the Cold War rather than disinterested explanations.” Vojtech Mastny, *Russia’s Road to the Cold War: Diplomacy, Warfare, and the Politics of Communism, 1941-1945* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), xiii.

¹³¹ Gaddis, “Emerging Post-Revisionist Synthesis,” 172.

¹³² Soviet sources remained a “trickle” during this period, as Mastny observed. Mastny, *Russia’s Road*, xiv. See also Gaddis, “Emerging Post-Revisionist Synthesis,” 176.

In an attempt to seize the middle ground, post-revisionists conceded a degree of intellectual validity to each interpretive school and then labored to synthesize what were deemed to be the most salient arguments from each. This approach to the existing historiography allowed post-revisionism, in theory if not always in practice, to utilize insights pragmatically from all interpretive schools. Bolstering the post-revisionist claim to greater interpretive accuracy was that its rise as a full-fledged school of interpretation coincided with the release of considerable archival materials from many capitalist bloc nations, including the United States and Britain. This new evidence seemingly permitted post-revisionist historians to formulate their arguments on the basis of direct reference to documents, rather than on the basis of speculative assumptions.¹³³ While orthodox, realist, and revisionist historians drew upon the new evidence in order to support their existing interpretations, which were originally formulated in the absence of any significant archival materials, post-revisionists claimed that the access to new documents and government archives, despite some limitations, provided an opportunity for new arguments to be advanced and old positions scrutinized.¹³⁴ Presumably, this new evidence would fill those gaps in the historical record that had previously been matters of conjecture, at least for the Western capitalist nations. Post-revisionists hoped that this new evidence would diminish the temptation of historians to project their own political sympathies or other presentist concerns into their respective analyses.¹³⁵

Despite its methodological eclecticism, post-revisionism converged upon a few common themes which were distilled from the various interpretive schools.

¹³³ Gaddis, "Emerging Post-Revisionist Synthesis," 175. Here, he claimed that revisionist arguments about the nature of the Soviet Union were "based upon faith, not research."

¹³⁴ Jones and Woods, 237.

Underpinning most post-revisionist accounts was a realist theory of international relations.¹³⁶ Realism's ability to appeal to scholars on both the left and the right of the political spectrum made it a natural bedfellow of post-revisionism.¹³⁷ For instance, Daniel Yergin's center-left analysis followed the realist emphasis upon the centrality of national interests and the distribution of material capabilities among nation-states. His concern with the security objectives of both superpowers followed directly from realistic premises: in an anarchic international system characterized by differences in the distribution of power among competing nations, achieving security was the primary objective of all nations regardless of ideological orientation or domestic structure.¹³⁸ As a result, post-revisionism continued the tradition established by realism (and heeded by revisionists) of regarding the international behavior of the Soviet state as fundamentally realistic, if heavy-handed and brutal. This view contrasted with the orthodox

¹³⁵ Lundestad, "Moralism, Presentism, Exceptionalism, Provincialism, and Other Extravagances in American Writings on the Early Cold War Years," *Diplomatic History* 13 (Fall 1989): 527-45.

¹³⁶ In a criticism of a seminal article written by Gaddis, Warren Kimball doubted that there was any significant distinction between post-revisionism and orthodoxy (which Kimball uses synonymously with realism). Kimball contended that "post-revisionism may serve to designate those histories that...avoid the kind of paranoiac name-calling of a decade ago, but they are still the same genus, if not species, as the realists – a geopolitical view of the Cold War in which the main philosophical content is little more than a vague but overarching pessimism about human nature and the use of force....Gaddis rejects revisionism and then builds primarily on so-called orthodoxy or realism." See Kimball, Response to John Lewis Gaddis, *Diplomatic History* 7 (Summer 1983), 199. However, this criticism conflates realism with orthodoxy, thus neglecting differences between realism and orthodoxy while discounting the often critical nature of the realist interpretation of U.S. foreign policy.

¹³⁷ Most revisionists relied to some extent upon both the realist critique of American foreign policy and the realist characterization of Soviet behavior for their respective studies. For example, Kolko, 57. With orthodoxy, there had been some acceptance of certain realist arguments by the 1960s, as indicated by Schlesinger, in Huthmacher and Susman, 59-60, 68-69.

¹³⁸ Yergin, 7-8. In his treatment of Wilsonianism (9-10), Yergin reaffirms his commitment to a fundamentally realistic understanding of the international system: "as it sought to remove conflict and anarchy from international relations, Wilsonianism was truly seeking to abolish the very substance of world politics – balance of power, spheres of influence, power politics. These are the ineluctable features of an international system composed of sovereign nations." However, he considered American leaders such as Franklin Delano Roosevelt to be pursuing Wilsonian ends through traditional means and, occasionally, merely offering lip service to Wilsonian ideals in order to placate the public (66).

characterization of the Soviet Union as an abnormal state powered by a totalitarian-ideological imperative that was global in its expansionary scope.

From revisionism, post-revisionists borrowed a concern for the role that American diplomatic pressure might have had in shaping Soviet activity; however, they tended to discount the primacy attributed to U.S. economic expansion.¹³⁹ While John Gaddis conceded that the United States used its economic might as a leveraging tool against the Soviet Union, he maintained that

economic instruments were used to serve political ends, not the other way around.... American economic strength was a potent weapon that could be used - and indeed, in the early days of the Cold War, was the primary weapon used - to help redress the political-military balance of power.¹⁴⁰

Furthermore, many post-revisionists incorporated into their analyses the revisionist argument that American foreign policy was imperialistic, although the notion was stripped of its negative connotation with the argument that intervention was established on the basis of invitation rather than imposition.¹⁴¹ Thus, most post-revisionists conceded that the Soviet Union posed a danger to the postwar vision and security objectives of the United States, although Soviet actions were not necessarily unprovoked. While U.S.

¹³⁹ Lundestad, *East, West, North, South: Major Developments in International Politics, 1945-1990* (Oslo: Norwegian University Press, 1986, revised, 1991), 33-34; Gaddis, *The United States and the Origins of the Cold War, 1941-1947* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972); Leffler, "National Security," *The Journal of American History* (June 1990), 150-51. One particular subfield of the post-revisionist school, corporatism, has explored in particularly great detail the functional links between domestic economic elites and American foreign policy. See Michael J. Hogan, "Corporatism: A Positive Appraisal," *Diplomatic History* 10 (Fall 1986): 363-72; idem., "Corporatism," *The Journal of American History* (June 1990): 153-60; Thomas J. McCormick, "Drift or Mastery? A Corporatist Synthesis for American Diplomatic History," *Reviews in American History* 10 (December 1982): 318-30.

¹⁴⁰ Gaddis, "Emerging Post-Revisionist Synthesis," 175.

¹⁴¹ Lundestad, "Empire by Invitation? The United States and Western Europe, 1945-1952," *Journal of Peace Research* 23 (September 1986): 263-77. A revised version appears in idem., *The American "Empire" and Other Studies of US Foreign Policy in a Comparative Perspective* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990). See also Gaddis, *The Long Peace: Inquiries Into the History of the Cold War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 43. He claimed that the goal of U.S. foreign policy "was not so much the creation of an American hegemony as it was a re-creation of independent centers of power capable of balancing each other as well as the Russians."

foreign policy may have constituted a threat to Soviet interests, post-revisionists generally maintained that this was an unintended effect of Washington's diplomatic policy. For instance, Vojtech Mastny suggested that the nuclear bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki by the United States resulted in the increasingly zealous and brutal pursuit of security by Stalin. Responding to the new security threat, Soviet officials engaged in a dramatic policy reappraisal which "prompted...the imposition of communist regimes in all countries the Soviet Union had overrun and a confrontation with the West over the issue of where the lines should be drawn" delimiting the Soviet sphere of interest.¹⁴² This view harked to realist and revisionist characterizations of Moscow's intentions, which considered the pursuit of Russian national (security) interests to be the most significant factor in the hierarchy of Soviet motives.

While post-revisionists differed over the best way to synthesize the insights of a very disparate array of interpretations, there was a conceptual device used in order to facilitate this *rapprochement*: the security dilemma. The mutual antagonism of the superpowers created a spiral of mistrust in which the defensive behavior of each nation was perceived as threatening by the other, thus leading to a consequent increase in its own pursuit of security and further aggravating an already-strained relationship. The model of the security spiral had a significant impact upon the Cold War narrative, for it replaced the action-reaction process, implying that a single agent could be "blamed" as the aggressor, with an interactive process in which blame was shared among both participants, or discarded as irrelevant to historical discussion.¹⁴³ The interactive model

¹⁴² Mastny, *Russia's Road*, 304-05. This argument ran contrary to the revisionist interpretation, which generally located the increasing brutality of the U.S.S.R.'s foreign policy in the early months of 1947.

¹⁴³ Lundestad, *East, West, North, South*, 34. Addressing the link between the political sympathies of the historian and (mono)causal explanations on the origins of the Cold War, Lundestad wrote: "Historians can

was explored in light of the post-revisionist focus on the role that mutual misperception of the opponent's intentions played in formulating policy decisions. Accepting the premise that American policy makers were genuinely alarmed by Soviet behavior in the early Cold War, and vice versa, post-revisionist historians became more concerned with explaining *why* there was such alarm.¹⁴⁴

Post-revisionists as different as John Gaddis and Melvyn Leffler accorded U.S. national security a central role in their respective texts, although there existed significant differences in their treatment of the concept. Curiously, much of this difference involved the interpretive weight that each accorded to the legitimacy of Soviet security concerns. For Gaddis, who doubted the rationality of Soviet concerns and claimed that ideological paranoia fed into Moscow's definition of its national interest, the magnitude of the American response was justified. Washington's perception, Gaddis maintained, was genuine in its concern and accurate in its estimation of the threat posed by Soviet unilateralism.¹⁴⁵ In contrast, Leffler dissented from Gaddis' view that American decision makers viewed the Soviet Union as an immediate threat and argued that the expansive definition of national security held by Washington was at the root of the deteriorating superpower relationship. Achieving American security objectives was of such crucial importance, Leffler contended, that U.S. officials were willing to risk war with the Soviet Union in pursuit of this grandiose security project that encompassed the Eurasian

describe what happened and suggest explanations as to why something happened. Causal explanations, in particular, often contain an element of attributing guilt or responsibility. But any discussion of guilt and responsibility is also influenced by the author's appraisal of how advantageous the outcome of a situation was. Whether the outcome was good or bad is, however, a political conclusion the individual reaches on the basis of his or her political orientation."

¹⁴⁴ Gaddis, *Long Peace*, 21, 46-47. See also Leffler, "National Security," 148, where he wrote that the United States' increased involvement in postwar international affairs "rest primarily in the ways American officials perceived external threats to core values."

¹⁴⁵ Gaddis, "Emerging Post-Revisionist Synthesis," 173. See also Gaddis, *Long Peace*, 21-22.

continent as well as the Americas.¹⁴⁶ While American policy makers may have been mistaken in their perception of the communist threat, post-revisionists generally acknowledged that this fear was at least sincere, rather than a smokescreen for economic self-interest. The central problem for post-revisionism, then, pertained to the connection between U.S. national (security) interests as defined by Washington and how this was linked to perceptions of the Kremlin's motives.¹⁴⁷ If the Soviet threat was belligerent and far-reaching, then the broadest definition of U.S. national security could be judged reasonable and prudent. However, if Soviet activity in the international arena was defensive and limited, then the sweeping definitions of U.S. national security were deemed overzealous and inappropriate responses that aggravated and prolonged a tragic situation.

While post-revisionists tended to be primarily concerned with the perceptions that the United States and its allies had of the Soviet Union, this could not be cleanly separated from renewed estimations of Moscow's intent. Most post-revisionist historians rejected the totalitarian-ideological model of Soviet motivation advanced by traditionalists. Despite the fact that Gaddis would later endorse totalitarianism and Marxist-Leninist ideology as highly significant factors for the Kremlin's motivation, in 1984 he described the orthodox characterization as an understandable, but unsatisfactory, rationalization, one that was "in many ways [a] gratifying explanation of the Russians' failure to cooperate with their former allies" which effectively "absolved the United

¹⁴⁶ Leffler, "The American Conception of National Security and the Beginnings of the Cold War, 1945-58," *American Historical Review* 89 (April 1984), 397. He later qualified this assessment with increased emphasis on the drawing of distinctions between "actual danger" and "perceived threat." In doing so, he gave more significance to the role of Soviet behavior relative to American policy formulation, though still considered "perceptions of the international system" to be of greater significance. See Leffler, "National Security," 144-45.

¹⁴⁷ See Leffler, "National Security."

States of responsibility for the breakdown of wartime cooperation.”¹⁴⁸ Rejecting orthodox claims that the Kremlin was driven by revolutionary internationalism and a totalitarian lust for power, post-revisionists emphasized a Soviet foreign policy which was security-oriented and lacked “any ideological blueprint for world revolution.”¹⁴⁹ According to this view, ideology occupied a position subordinate to *realpolitik* within the hierarchy of Soviet motives. Post-revisionist historians generally treated communist ideology as a rhetorical instrument employed by the Soviet leadership in order to facilitate its pursuit of national interests. As Yergin argued, although the Soviet leadership “spoke in the language of Marxism-Leninism, they were primarily concerned with power as traditionally conceived in the international system.” The pursuit of power involved, first and foremost, the achievement of national security, which was to be attained by “carving a sphere of influence...out of bordering countries.”¹⁵⁰ Lundestad argued in a similar fashion, noting that “it seems improbable that Stalin and the Soviet hierarchy had any kind of elaborate plans for the whole of Eastern Europe when the war ended.” He proposed that the flexibility of Soviet policy was inversely proportional to the security value of a particular nation for the Kremlin and that postwar planning varied in depth and design according to that significance.¹⁵¹ The post-revisionist interpretation, then, tended to characterize Soviet motives as conforming to the *realpolitik* that guided most “normal” great power states. To the extent that Marxist-Leninist ideology

¹⁴⁸ Gaddis, *Long Peace*, 40. In this section, Gaddis was discussing the influence of the totalitarian-ideological model relative to various policy makers within the United States during the early Cold War period. However, his critique of totalitarianism and Marxism-Leninism is easily applied to the works of most traditionalist historians, who followed this deterministic view of Moscow’s foreign policy motives.

¹⁴⁹ Gaddis, “Emerging Post-Revisionist Synthesis,” 180.

¹⁵⁰ Yergin, 10.

¹⁵¹ Lundestad, *American Non-Policy*, 465.

infiltrated the strategic outlook of Kremlin officials, post-revisionists claimed that it was manifest in a deep-rooted distrust for capitalist nations that hindered cooperation.

In fact, several post-revisionists went beyond claiming that ideology was an insignificant factor in Soviet motivation and argued that Stalin and the other policy makers in the Soviet Union lacked any sort of blueprint for the future. Regardless of the realism or idealism of their purported objectives, the Soviet leadership was simply in no position to pursue a coherent foreign policy. Yergin described Moscow's behavior as based upon traditional power politics, acknowledging that the weakened material capabilities of the communist superpower necessitated a cautious foreign policy:

The U.S.S.R. behaved as a traditional great power, intent upon aggrandizing itself along the lines of historic Russian goals, favoring spheres of influence...and the other methods and mores from the "old diplomacy." Moreover, if the Soviet Union had harbored ambitions of unlimited expansion, it was hardly in a position to pursue them....it was a ruined, ravaged country in 1945.¹⁵²

Against this view, Vojtech Mastny maintained that there was more focus and rationality to Stalin's conduct than some post-revisionists cared to admit, although "Stalin's goals should be considered as evolving rather than as a design firmly fixed and single-mindedly pursued."¹⁵³ Sharing Mastny's view on the dictator's approach to foreign policy, Gaddis characterized Stalin as "a cagey but insecure opportunist" who exploited "tactical openings" but lacked "any long-term strategy for, or even very much interest in, promoting the spread of communism beyond the Soviet sphere."¹⁵⁴

Post-revisionists also attempted to strike a balance between orthodox, realist, and revisionist positions in their consideration of intrabloc relations between the Soviet Union and its allies. Most post-revisionists emphasized that the Soviet Union was driven by a

¹⁵² Yergin, 12.

¹⁵³ Mastny, *Russia's Road*, xvii.

pragmatic policy which was more inflexible in those areas of prime security concern, such as Eastern Europe, and less so in those areas where Soviet security or prestige would not be seriously jeopardized, such as Greece.¹⁵⁵ Importantly, while most post-revisionists acknowledged that the United States made use of various instruments in order to gain leverage and promote its interests in Eastern Europe, they did not feel (contrary to most revisionists) that Soviet activity in the area was always in response to American initiatives.¹⁵⁶ Borrowing from the revisionist analysis, post-revisionism emphasized the dynamic interrelationship between local struggles and the larger superpower conflict. As Lundestad observed of previous historiography, “Soviet policy towards the various countries in Eastern Europe has usually been considered as uniform, in that it was basically one and the same for the whole region.” This perception of uniformity, he contended, was prevalent among both those historians who felt that Soviet plans for the conquest of Eastern Europe existed prior to the defeat of Germany (an argument mainly held by orthodox scholars, and certain realists such as Kennan) and those historians who felt that the Soviet Union never had any pre-established plans for expanding into the region (an argument mainly held by revisionists, and certain realists such as Halle). In contrast, Lundestad proposed that Soviet policy should be considered as predetermined

¹⁵⁴ Gaddis, “Emerging Post-Revisionist Synthesis,” 181.

¹⁵⁵ In fact, Stalin had acknowledged in an October 1944 agreement with Churchill that Greece was a British sphere of influence, and had adopted an attitude that “varied between indifference and outright hostility” toward the Greek leftists during the civil war, in keeping with this agreement. This seemed to suggest that the Soviet Union did function as a “normal” nation in that it operated on the basis of *realpolitik* and merely used ideological solidarity when it served Russian interests. However, the common view of communism and the Soviet Union in the United States in 1947 was such that Washington’s “interpretation of events in Greece...assumed a Russian mastermind behind the scenes in every local crisis.” Yergin, 289-90.

¹⁵⁶ Lundestad, *East, West, North, South*, 33; Gaddis, *United States and the Origins of the Cold War*, 355-57.

and inflexible for those nations of primary significance to Russian security and more pliant in those nations of secondary or tertiary significance.¹⁵⁷

As the source material that was emerging from the archives during the late 1960s and 1970s was almost entirely Western in origin, it is unsurprising that many post-revisionists focused upon American and European perceptions of the Soviet Union. This focus seemingly reduced the need for the historian's personal view of Soviet intentions to encroach upon his or her analysis, as attention could now be directed toward the mentality of Western historical actors. However, even limiting attention to American or European perceptions of Soviet motives could not alleviate the necessity of relying upon a particular characterization of Soviet motivation in order to write an effective narrative. The Kremlin's motivations could not be isolated from the evaluation of U.S. foreign policy, for it was against this assumed intent that the prudence of Washington's diplomacy was evaluated.

The way in which an historian's understanding of Soviet motivation was integral to the narrative may be illustrated through a consideration of Leffler's article, "The American Conception of National Security and the Beginnings of the Cold War, 1945-48." Leffler stated at the outset that his article "does not pretend to discern the motivations and objectives of the Soviet Union." Instead, he maintained, his goal was "to elucidate the fundamental strategic and economic considerations that shaped the

¹⁵⁷ See Lundestad, *American Non-Policy*, 435-65. Citation on p. 435. Lundestad's inclusion of Halle in the latter category, suggesting Russia's "non-plan" towards Eastern Europe, seems to be based on Halle's argument that Soviet expansion was the result of systemic forces beyond the control or scope of a single nation. Halle wrote: "By 1948 the general view in the West was that, in accordance with Communist ideology, Stalin had the domination of the entire world as his goal. In fact, as we now know, the forces under his leadership were going beyond where he wanted them to go. They were being drawn into the power vacuum to a greater extent than he wanted. He was not altogether in control of the situation. No statesman ever is." Halle, 86.

definition of American national security interests in the postwar world.”¹⁵⁸ However, it was made clear in the response to the article by Bruce Kuniholm, and also in Leffler’s rebuttal, that the initial analysis was dependent upon a particular understanding of Soviet motivation.

Kuniholm criticized Leffler for attributing responsibility for the Cold War to the “unnecessarily provocative” security project pursued by American officials, rather than to threatening Soviet behavior.¹⁵⁹ He argued that Leffler’s analysis of American perceptions had to be connected to the role of Soviet behavior and motivation; in fact, it was on this point that the main differences between Leffler and Kuniholm arose. Kuniholm probed at the assumptions that underpinned Leffler’s article and how an alternate conception of Moscow’s intentions could produce a very different interpretation – one that Kuniholm found more persuasive. “Given ‘legitimate’ Soviet security concerns,” Kuniholm postulated,

the question is whether Soviet behavior in 1944-46 was appropriate to those concerns. Professor Leffler seems to think so. I think that it was not. Our answers to this question qualify our different definitions of “legitimate” in the next question: given “legitimate” U.S. security concerns, was U.S. policy in 1946-47 appropriate? Leffler appears to think that it was not. I think that it was.¹⁶⁰

Soviet motivation, then, was of great significance to Leffler’s evaluation of American foreign policy, and the perceptions that informed that policy – even if it was not considered explicitly. His critique of the United States’ behavior in the early Cold War was, in fact, predicated upon his particular characterization of Soviet intent.

¹⁵⁸ Leffler, “American Conception of National Security,” 348.

¹⁵⁹ Kuniholm, Response to Melvyn Leffler, *American Historical Review* 89 (April 1984), 385-86. As Kuniholm stated, “Soviet actions (not just *perceptions* of Soviet actions) must be given far greater weight than Professor Leffler gives them; the international political contexts within which conceptions of national security developed, moreover, must be explored in much greater depth if we are to understand why those conceptions developed in the manner that they did.” Author’s emphasis.

¹⁶⁰ Kuniholm, Response to Melvyn Leffler, 388.

Responding to Kuniholm's criticism, Leffler marshaled a defense that focused specifically on the issue of Soviet motivation. Challenging Kuniholm's treatment of the U.S.S.R., Leffler retorted: "Soviet behavior, while worrisome, did not constitute relentless pressure or systematic intimidation."¹⁶¹ Moreover, he argued, the fears of war possessed by Washington officials were not fears of Soviet aggression, but apprehension over the possibility of a firm Soviet response to America's own strategic ambitions:

When American officials talked about war arising out of a miscalculation, and this was the only cause of war in their view, they meant that they might underestimate the Soviet perception of threat engendered by American actions or that the Soviets might underestimate the West's determination to carry out its goals even if it meant war.¹⁶²

Built into Leffler's argument was a particular characterization of Soviet motives that enabled him to evaluate the intent and appropriateness of American policy. For Kuniholm, who held a much different perspective on the U.S.S.R.'s ambitions, American policy was evaluated much differently. The exchange between Leffler and Kuniholm is suggestive of the problem afflicting *all* historical interpretations of the superpower conflict: the historian had to embrace a particular understanding of Moscow's foreign policy motivation, but those intentions could not be convincingly established on the basis of the existing documentary record. As such, historians were required to make leaps of interpretive faith in arranging the different factors within the hierarchy of Soviet motives. These interpretive leaps about the historical past, however, were closely connected to the contemporary political inclinations of a given historian.

Like historians of the other schools, post-revisionists linked their analyses with current events. For example, Yergin posed two questions which, he claimed, were asked

¹⁶¹ Leffler, Reply to John Lewis Gaddis and Bruce Kuniholm, *American Historical Review* 89 (April 1984), 394-96. Citation on p. 396.

by American policy makers in the early Cold War. The first question was that of the relationship between communist ideology and Soviet foreign policy. The second question turned to whether or not a totalitarian domestic sphere necessarily translated into a totalitarian foreign policy. This same pair of questions, he claimed, persisted to the present day. In a manner clearly informed by the superpower *détente* then underway, Yergin addressed these problems by dividing U.S. foreign policy discourse over the Soviet Union into two camps. The first position, described as the Riga axioms, accepted the totalitarian-ideological thesis as determinate of Moscow's foreign policy. The second position, described as the Yalta axioms, emphasized the *realpolitik* of Soviet conduct and downplayed the role of ideology.¹⁶³

As put forth by Yergin, each set of axioms about Moscow's intentions entailed a particular policy response by the United States. The Riga axioms, he observed, "triumphed in American policy circles in the postwar years and provided a foundation for the anticommunist consensus." The adoption of the Riga axioms by U.S. policy officials resulted in the view that "the effort to make a diplomatic settlement became irrelevant, even dangerous...[given] the revolutionary, messianic, predatory character of the Soviet Union."¹⁶⁴ Conversely, the Yalta axioms were tied to a notion of Soviet motivation that was fundamentally realistic; that is, deriving its policy orientation from a rational definition of its national interests. Following the Yalta axioms, the frequent call of realist

¹⁶² Leffler, Reply, 397.

¹⁶³ Yergin, 10. Yergin's use of the term "Riga" alluded to the U.S. observation post established in Latvia following the Russian Revolution, which was representative of the anti-communist diplomatic approach advanced by the State Department's Soviet Service during the interwar years, distinguished by its opposition to the recognition of communist Russia and, subsequently, the Soviet Union (18-20). Yergin's use of the term "Yalta" alluded to the Yalta Conference of February 1945 and, more generally, to Roosevelt's wartime dealings with the Soviet Union, which were predicated upon his belief "that Russia could no longer be considered...beyond the pale of morality and international politics" and was thus most effectively engaged on the basis of traditional diplomacy rather than exclusion (55).

scholars for a negotiated settlement between the superpowers carried considerable weight. Yergin suggested that, while the Yalta axioms fell into disfavor in the early Cold War, they gained considerable currency during the détente era. This battle between perceptions, Yergin suggested, was not necessarily one in which a particular view was superior: “Neither set of axioms had a monopoly on truth. Both emphasized some aspects of reality, and obscured others.”¹⁶⁵ Despite this cautionary note, it is clear throughout *Shattered Peace* that Yergin favored the Yalta axioms, which had seemingly produced, at least in part, the conditions necessary for superpower détente.¹⁶⁶

In fact, if Yergin’s argument is followed, it was not the accuracy of either set of axioms that most mattered, but how that choice evoked a particular set of policies for dealing with the Soviet Union. This was a problem not only for contemporary American policy officials, but also for diplomatic historians writing after the fact. As there was no overwhelming methodological reason to select one set of axioms over another as representative of the “true” Soviet intentions as may have existed in the past, presentist concerns and political inclinations did seem, at a minimum, to lend greater credibility to particular choices at particular times. In the case of *Shattered Peace*, the détente era in which it was written gave greater credence to the notion that Soviet leaders were reasonable and realistic, rather than a group of irrational, power-hungry communist ideologues driven to endless expansion. This seemingly provided greater interpretive weight to studies such as Yergin’s, which searched for the present qualities exhibited by

¹⁶⁴ Yergin, 10-11.

¹⁶⁵ Yergin, 11.

¹⁶⁶ Yergin, 12. Yergin claimed that American policy makers who followed the Riga axioms “misinterpreted both the range and degree of the Soviet challenge and the character of Soviet objectives and so downplayed the possibilities for diplomacy and accommodation.” This statement again illustrates how a particular conception of Soviet motivation was connected with formulating appropriate policy – a task that concerned both policy makers and academics dealing with the subject of superpower diplomacy.

the Kremlin, as they might have existed in the Soviet state of the early Cold War, and then sought to explain why American policy makers failed to recognize those qualities and react more appropriately.

To post-revisionism's credit, its generally cautious mixture of orthodox, realist, and revisionist arguments mitigated some of the hyperbole and rigidity built into the claims of the various interpretive schools. By discounting the more excessive leaps of logic made by the orthodox school about the primacy of totalitarian-ideological motives for the Soviet Union, post-revisionists gave a more sympathetic consideration to Soviet security concerns. By similarly discounting various assumptions made by revisionists about the purely defensive nature of Soviet behavior, post-revisionists attempted to reconstruct the interactive and evolving nature of the relations between the superpowers. And finally, most post-revisionists generally took the criticisms of realist theory to heart by considering how definitions of the national interest were not fixed according to an objective geopolitical reality, but were quite malleable and subject to frequent redefinition.

However, while post-revisionist historians were not beholden to a particular characterization of Soviet foreign policy, picking and choosing from the existing interpretations did not produce more accurate representations that had miraculously been shed of political inclinations and presentist concerns. Post-revisionists often presumed that a synthesis of opposing views would necessarily - as if through a process of natural selection - weed out the weaker propositions. However, given the sheer range of different approaches available within post-revisionist literature, it appears that few propositions were really weeded out. As Thomas McCormick lamented, the post-

revisionist assumption that “multiplicity rather than articulation...is equivalent to sophistication” led to narratives which exchanged a systematic treatment of causal factors for an eclecticism that often rang with analytical hollowness.¹⁶⁷

As with the other major interpretive schools, post-revisionists were necessarily reliant upon certain enabling assumptions about what was contained within the “black box” of Soviet motivation. Making these assumptions was an inescapable task in the writing of Cold War history, but there was no methodological basis with which diplomatic historians could debate their competing views. Were Kremlin officials genuinely perturbed by the United States? Was it safe to conclude that the Soviet Union stopped expanding further into Europe simply because its thirst for security had been slaked? Or could it be convincingly established that Washington’s political and economic policy initiatives had really been the bulwark against the unlimited Soviet aggression that would have otherwise occurred? The answers to these questions were intimately tied to characterizations of Soviet motivation, and shifted accordingly. It remained to be seen what impact direct documentary evidence from communist bloc archives would have upon the assumptions that historians made about the intentions of Moscow’s foreign policy and thus the nature of the Cold War.

¹⁶⁷ McCormick, “Drift or Mastery,” 319. See also Kimball, Response to John Lewis Gaddis, 199.

Chapter Five: The Cold War Is History

As the Cold War wound to its generally unforeseen conclusion, it was apparent that the historiography of the period was also poised to enter its own “brave new world.” As an event now fixed with a beginning and an end, historians of the Cold War could now reconsider its birth in light of its peculiar death. Perhaps even more tantalizing for diplomatic historians was the promise of access to official documents secreted away in Soviet archives. The nature of the information to be found within those archives had long been a matter of speculation, and diplomatic historians eagerly anticipated the new light that research in communist archives could shed upon Soviet motivation. Was Soviet behavior in the international arena totalitarian in nature, as orthodox historians claimed? Or was the Kremlin operating in accordance with “normal” state behavior, as realists, revisionists, and many post-revisionists argued? At long last, the motives powering Moscow’s behavior could be debated with direct reference to official government sources, and diplomatic historians would no longer be forced to contend with the “black box” predicament. It was presumed that the emerging evidence would come to contradict erroneous assumptions in the historical literature, thus resolving controversy over Soviet motivation. And, given the integral role of Soviet behavior to the history of the early Cold War, such a resolution would necessarily produce significant changes in how diplomatic historians wrote about the conflict.

As the Soviet bloc fragmented, a figurative earthquake running along two intersecting fault lines shook Cold War historians, as evidence and historiography jostled against each other uncomfortably. Scholars struggled to reconceptualize the Cold War in a manner capable of explaining its unexpected conclusion, while simultaneously

grappling with the logistical problems entailed by the influx of new evidence. The end of the Cold War marked one of those rare occasions when a significant body of new primary source material emerges nearly contemporaneously with current events that challenge previous historical interpretations. As with every earthquake, even the most precise instruments never manage to predict its exact magnitude nor the damage it may wreak. The same difficulty was encountered by historians of the Cold War, for there was simply no way of estimating how the new sources on Soviet conduct would affect historiography. Diplomatic historians were most certainly aware that the ground of scholarly inquiry was shaking underfoot, although the implications for the historiography were not readily apparent.

New evidence was drawn from a myriad of communist archives. The Russian Federation, East European nations, China, communist parties in the West and developing world, and the various (nominally) supranational institutions that served the communist bloc all broke their silence to a greater or lesser degree. Archival access was granted to foreign scholars. Collections of governmental documents were selected, translated, and published. Memoirs written by former Soviet officials were no longer subject to strict censorship. Maintaining the party line was no longer a prerequisite for publication. With regard to the (former) Soviet Union, researchers were able to scour the archives of the Politburo, the Comintern, the Cominform, the Central Committee (including its international department), and the Foreign Ministry archives, to an extent that would have been impossible during the Cold War.

Yet, despite such unprecedented freedom of access to communist archives, excitement was unexpectedly muted. The findings, it seemed, were not as sensational as

hoped. While the documents drawn from communist archives were significant and became the focus of many informative and incisive analyses, they did not seem to provide unassailable evidence on any of the key historiographical debates. Archival access, though exponentially better than it once had been, remained haphazard, incomplete, and fettered by political and economic considerations.¹⁶⁸ Moreover, the most important policy decisions made by the Politburo, as well as the personal papers of Stalin and Molotov involving sensitive matters of foreign affairs, remained in the Presidential archives and inaccessible to most scholars.¹⁶⁹ In addition, most of the Foreign Ministry's incoming and outgoing ciphered telegrams remained unobtainable due to security considerations.¹⁷⁰ After an enthusiastic burst of declassification from 1991 until late 1994, progress was further hindered by the Russian currency crisis, budget reductions for the archives, and the political situation in Russia, especially with regard to Chechnya.¹⁷¹

Notwithstanding its limitations, the new evidence added considerable detail to many of the more "concrete" topics pertaining to the Soviet Union, thus allowing diplomatic historians to bolster their arguments with references to official documentation. Additional demands were placed upon scholars of the Cold War to write more nuanced accounts of Soviet behavior which could accommodate the new information in all of its

¹⁶⁸ Haslam, 220. See also Mark Kramar, "Archival Research in Moscow: Progress and Pitfalls," *Cold War International History Project Bulletin* 3 (Fall 1993): 1, 18-39.

¹⁶⁹ "Final Report of the Joint Task Force on Archives, American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies, and The American Historical Association, 1 April 1995," *Slavic Review* 54, no. 2 (Summer 1995), 417-18. The authors wrote, "Of all the official archives in the former Soviet bloc, two are particularly notable for their importance to the region as a whole and their particular inaccessibility. The Presidential (Kremlin) Archives contain the Communist Party's most sensitive documents, including those relating to its Congresses, Central Committee plenums, the Politburo, the Party's top leaders, and critical relations with communist parties and leaders abroad. Archives of the former KGB and its affiliated secret police agencies throughout the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, contain materials absolutely central to the history of the USSR and the Soviet bloc. Neither the Presidential nor the KGB archives are accessible to researchers."

¹⁷⁰ See Garthoff, 247.

diversity. Among the most significant areas in which communist archival sources contributed to scholarly inquiry were the structure and day-to-day operation of the decision-making apparatus in the Kremlin and the manner in which the Soviet Union conducted itself vis-à-vis communist parties in other nations. Even in these areas, however, there remained ample ground for continued debate among historians, and often interpretive disputes were shaped by fundamental disagreements over the nature of Soviet motives.

While perhaps not a topic of revelatory proportions, considerable detail was added to the structure and process of Soviet decision making. In his evaluation of what the new evidence revealed about the Soviet Union, Raymond Garthoff noted that it was more significant for demonstrating “the coin of internal discourse (and thinking) in the Soviet leadership” than for the revelations (or lack thereof) that it provided on controversial Cold War events.¹⁷² Based on the available archival documents, most historians agreed that policy was not entirely decided at the top, but shared among Stalin’s inner cadre of foreign policy advisors and their respective aides, who controlled the flow of information that reached the highest office. Odd Arne Westad acknowledged that there was “some autonomy” for certain departments and ministries, particularly those involved in the military, the diplomatic corps, and the secret police.¹⁷³ As Haslam contended, the notion that all significant decisions were taken solely by Stalin was a rather convenient fiction propagated by Khrushchev and Molotov in particular, both of whom had a vested interest in emphasizing the dictator’s absolute power and thus “absolv[ing] everyone else of guilt

¹⁷¹ Westad, “Secrets of the Second World,” *Diplomatic History* 21, no. 2 (Spring 1997), 259-61; see also “Final Report of the Joint Task Force on Archives,” 407-26.

¹⁷² Garthoff, 245.

¹⁷³ Westad, “Secrets of the Second World,” 263.

or complicity.”¹⁷⁴ However, several historians dissented from this view. Robert Tucker, for example, gave the accounts of Khrushchev and Molotov more credence and accepted their respective interviews and memoirs at face value.¹⁷⁵ The disparity over the truth-value attributed to the primary sources seemed to validate quite different interpretations – not only of the topic narrowly considered, but of the motives for Soviet foreign policy in a broader sense. For Haslam, evidence of Molotov’s frequent and “forceful” disagreements with Stalin revealed that decision-making processes inside the Kremlin were “inevitably more complicated than the unreal totalitarian image allows.”¹⁷⁶ For Tucker, Stalin’s absolute control of the foreign policy machinery explained why the Soviet Union was inclined to inexorable expansion, for Moscow’s external affairs were a direct reflection of the man characterized as “a Russian imperial communist bent on aggrandizing the Soviet empire where possible.”¹⁷⁷

Moscow’s relationship to (East and West) Germany, China, Eastern Europe, and (North and South) Korea were all enriched by the new evidence.¹⁷⁸ The most significant aspect of the debate was the extent to which the Kremlin exerted control over its communist allies, which served as a measure of the ideological solidarity that actually existed among bloc nations, and of whether or not this motive eclipsed the imperatives of *realpolitik*. Problematically, the source documents made reference to both idealistic and realistic policy calculations in sufficient quantity to provide affirmation for both

¹⁷⁴ Haslam, 221-23.

¹⁷⁵ Tucker, “The Cold War in Stalin’s Time,” *Diplomatic History* 21, no. 2 (Spring 1997), 276-77.

¹⁷⁶ Haslam, 221.

¹⁷⁷ Tucker, 281.

¹⁷⁸ For example, Norman Naimark, *The Russians in Germany: A History of the Soviet Zone of Occupation, 1945-1949* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995); Chen Jian, *China’s Road to the Korean War: The Making of the Sino-American Confrontation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994); Vladislav Zubok, “Stalin’s Plans and Russian Archives,” *Diplomatic History* 21, no. 2 (Spring 1997), 298-300; Sergei

arguments. The presence of ideological language suggested to many scholars that revolutionary romanticism and communist solidarity may have had a significant impact upon the functioning of the bloc. Following this argument, bloc coherence was portrayed as extremely high and coordinated on the basis of Marxist-Leninist ideology as interpreted by the Kremlin.¹⁷⁹ But once again, the manner in which historians accorded the source material different truth-values varied according to the hierarchy of Soviet motives that they already favored. For instance, the publication of correspondence between Stalin and Mao indicated the different outcomes that could be produced by those historians that favored ideology over realism, or vice versa. For Douglas Macdonald, the relationship between the communist leaders was a symbol of a “Sino-Soviet revolutionary link” that demonstrated an “attitude...found in any ideologically-driven patron-client relationship, and represented...a high degree of Soviet control over CCP policies” that fit with the traditionalist view.¹⁸⁰ Similarly, John Gaddis argued that, while there did not appear to be “an international communist monolith controlled from Moscow,” there was an “ideological euphoria” immanent in the documents which was indicative of the communist leaders’ inclination to throw “caution to the wind” and formulate aggressive designs in Asia with the “conviction that the forces of history were on their side.”¹⁸¹ However, scholars such as David Holloway perceived a canny *realpolitik* at the heart of the primary sources pertaining to communist bloc relations. Most significant were the calculated geopolitical concerns that Mao and Stalin exhibited

N. Goncharov, John W. Lewis, and Xue Litai, *Uncertain Partners: Stalin, Mao, and the Korean War* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993).

¹⁷⁹ Douglas J. Macdonald, “Communist Bloc Expansion in the Early Cold War: Challenging Realism, Refuting Revisionism,” *International Security* 20, no. 3 (Winter 1995/96), 185.

¹⁸⁰ Macdonald, 178-79.

¹⁸¹ Gaddis, *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 83.

with regard to a resurgent Japan allied with the United States.¹⁸² According to this view, the archival evidence seemed to confirm that Moscow encountered frequent and genuine difficulties while managing and coordinating its bloc, suggesting that the interplay of particular national interests among communist nations took precedence over ideological solidarity.¹⁸³ In support of this view, diplomatic historians stressed a general pattern of Soviet behavior that appeared to be responsive and pragmatic rather than committed to ideologically-predetermined objectives.¹⁸⁴

The manner in which sources from communist archives were implicated in the problem of writing about Soviet motivation was exemplified by the heated debate over the origins of the Korean War. Information surfaced that suggested closer cooperation between Stalin, Mao Tse-tung, and Kim Il Sung than had been presumed by most revisionists (and also some realists), although the relationship between Stalin and other communist national leaders involved a greater degree of compromise and negotiation than most orthodox scholars postulated.¹⁸⁵ Included in this new body of evidence were some seemingly damning documents which indicated that it had been Stalin's deliberate nod that had prompted Kim to launch an invasion in June 1950 designed to reunify the Korean peninsula. According to this interpretation, which has dominated the post-Cold

¹⁸² This is particularly evident with regard to the author's discussion of the purposes of the Sino-Soviet treaty negotiated by Stalin and Mao, and signed by Zhou and Vyshinskii on February 14, 1950. Despite the ideological rhetoric, he claimed that the main focus of the treaty was concern over the resurgence of a militant Japan, especially in alliance with the United States. See David Holloway, *Stalin and the Atom Bomb: The Soviet Union and Atomic Energy, 1939-1956* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 276.

¹⁸³ Westad, "Secrets of the Second World," 269-70.

¹⁸⁴ For example, Naimark, 465-68; Westad, "Secrets of the Second World," 269-70.

¹⁸⁵ For a particularly interesting discussion of how the new evidence shed light upon one of the more mysterious events in the history of the Soviet bloc, Mao Tse-tung's visit to Moscow from December 1949 until January 1950, see Mastny, *The Cold War and Soviet Insecurity: The Stalin Years* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 88-90. Mastny revealed that the "minutes of the historic conversations hardly bear out the Chinese descriptions of Stalin's imperious boorishness and his guest's insulted dignity, images that Mao himself – no doubt retrospectively embarrassed by the extent of subordination he had once been willing to accept in relation to Moscow – later tried to disseminate."

War literature on the origins of the Korean War, Stalin considered a Soviet-American imbroglio on the Korean peninsula a liability and did not assent to the North Korean leadership's repeated exhortations for aid until he became (mistakenly) convinced that it would not provoke an entanglement with the U.S. Among the most significant pieces of evidence to emerge from communist archives was a history of Soviet and Chinese involvement in the Korean War compiled in 1966 by unidentified Soviet Foreign Ministry staff and intended for only the highest echelon of Moscow's policy elite. While the author(s) of the text were unknown, Kathryn Weathersby asserted that "one may confidently infer that this information is accurate" because it would "simply have been impossible" for the author(s) of the document to "baldly...contradict the often repeated Soviet line on this highly sensitive subject unless these statements were true."¹⁸⁶

Particularly incriminating was the document's description of the preparations undertaken by Stalin, Mao, and Kim in the months prior to the outbreak of hostilities:

Stalin at first treated the persistent appeals of Kim Il Sung with reserve, noting that "such a large affair in relation to South Korea ... needs much preparation," but he did not object in principle. The final agreement to support the plans of the Koreans was given by Stalin at the time of Kim Il Sung's visit to Moscow in March-April 1950. Following this, in May, Kim Il Sung visited Beijing and secured the support of Mao.¹⁸⁷

Based on this and similar sources, a dominant interpretation emerged in which Stalin was held to be primarily responsible for initiating the Korean War. Robert Tucker claimed that the Soviet dictator "decided on his own, and for his own reasons, to give assent and

¹⁸⁶ Kathryn Weathersby, "New Findings on the Korean War," *Cold War International History Project Bulletin* 3 (Fall 1993), 14.

¹⁸⁷ "On the Korean War, 1950-53, and the Armistice Negotiations," in *Cold War International History Project Bulletin* 3 (Fall 1993), 15-17.

provide the necessary support for the operation [to attack South Korea]...The Korean War and resulting intensification [of the Cold War] were crucially Stalin's doing."¹⁸⁸

Other historians noted, however, that the new evidence did not necessarily support what had been taken as indelible proof of Stalin's responsibility for the Korean War. David Holloway noted that "the recently declassified Chinese and Soviet documents do not reveal the strategic thinking behind Stalin's decision."¹⁸⁹ The evidence, William Wohlforth claimed, provided little insight into why Stalin abandoned his attempts to cooperate with the West in favor of supporting revolutions in Asia, making any assertion of responsibility problematic. While the *immediate* cause of the Korean War seemingly lay in Stalin's assent, the context that led to such a strategic shift remained blurry.¹⁹⁰ Here again, alternative contextualization of the source material could produce quite different results; the new evidence did not – and perhaps could not – determine the causes of the Korean War in and of itself. Indeed, much of the historiographical contention over the Korean War involved how best to contextualize the new evidence; that is, the most appropriate way to fit it into a larger framework. As historians such as Bruce Cumings demonstrated, an alternative contextual frame could produce dramatically different interpretations of a given document's meaning. Cumings emphasized that the dominant interpretation of the new documents perilously ignored both local and regional contexts. The Korean War was, after all, a *civil* war – one that, Cumings noted, began well in advance of the 25 June 1950 date traditionally regarded as the outbreak of hostilities. In this regard, he noted that the "hotheaded" leaders of North

¹⁸⁸ Tucker, 277. See also Macdonald, 180.

¹⁸⁹ Holloway, 277.

¹⁹⁰ Wohlforth, 236. See also Weathersby, "Should We Fear This? Stalin and the Danger of War with America," *Cold War International History Project Working Paper* 39 (July 2002), 3.

and South Korea were attempting to incite an “unprovoked” attack by the other side in order to secure more substantial great power patronage.¹⁹¹ Moreover, Cumings emphasized that the involvement of the United States in the Korean conflict was best explained in terms of a world-systemic context interconnected with America’s domestic economy:

The struggle with communism was thus but one part, and the secondary part, of a project to revive the world economy from the devastation of the global depression and World War II... The Korean War, seen by the North Koreans as a war of national liberation in the face of American attempts to re-stitch South Korea’s economic linkages with Japan, turned into the crisis that built the American national security state.¹⁹²

Thus, the manner in which the historian chose to contextualize the new evidence was closely related to the motivational attributes assigned to the state actors involved in the conflict. There remained a striking range of ways in which the archival sources could be integrated into established explanations for how, why, and even when, the Korean War occurred.

Despite the increasing sophistication and nuance that the emerging evidence added to many concrete research areas, it provided few answers to the more abstract problem of Soviet motivation. Historians of each interpretive school were able to reaffirm the validity of their respective positions through a judicious use of documents from communist archives. Was the Soviet Union compelled by totalitarian-ideological imperatives to expand insatiably? Or was the Kremlin’s realistic desire for security at the root of its behavior? Both positions could be plausibly supported on the basis of the new evidence from communist archives. Moreover, both explanations adequately explained

¹⁹¹ For a discussion of the local context, see Bruce Cumings, Letter to the Editor, 11 July 1995, *Cold War International History Project Bulletin* 6/7 (Winter 1995/1996), 120-21.

contradictory evidence by according it a subordinate value in the hierarchy of Soviet motives. While John Lewis Gaddis surmised an “ideological euphoria” in the Stalin-Mao communications that led them, he claimed, to make unrealistic policy decisions inclined toward rash action in the Koreas, David Holloway emphasized the distrust between the two communist leaders as they cautiously formulated a strategy based upon common geopolitical concerns regarding the security of the Korean peninsula and the threat of a resurgent Japan.¹⁹³ The situation was paradoxical: the interpretation of source documents required the historian to perform a leap of interpretive faith regarding which types of statements were the most representative of Soviet motives. In a circular fashion, however, the conceptual hierarchy of Soviet motive factors accepted by a given historian then shaped the evidence.

While the new evidence seemed to support multiple characterizations of Soviet motivation, leaving the major schools of thought that developed during the Cold War essentially intact, there were two significant developments in the historiography that occurred in the post-Cold War era. First, there was a general gravitation towards the orthodox school (especially among post-revisionists of a center-right political persuasion) and increased appreciation for that school’s arguments about the superpower conflict. Second, a greater emphasis was given to the role of ideas, especially Marxist-Leninist ideology, as the primary motive force behind Soviet behavior. As orthodoxy had generally been the only interpretive school to accord ideology a central role in the shaping of Soviet foreign policy, the two historiographical shifts proved mutually

¹⁹² Cumings, “The American Century and the Third World,” *Diplomatic History* 23, no. 2 (Spring 1999), 361.

¹⁹³ Gaddis, *We Now Know*, 83; Holloway, 274-76.

reinforcing.¹⁹⁴ As the new source material, in and of itself, did not seem to contradict any view, accounting for this general shift toward (neo)orthodoxy thus provides considerable insight into how and why particular schools of interpretation rise and fall in stature.

With the collapse of the Cold War, many scholars returned to traditionalist arguments, which had long been regarded as the unfashionable bastion of American “court historians” and vituperative anti-communists. That the gravitational pull of orthodoxy increased relative to the other interpretive schools was unsurprising: orthodox scholars were, after all, the faithful defenders of America’s role in the Cold War. Despite differences between the liberal and conservative factions, orthodox historians generally held that U.S. policy after the Second World War was indeed “the brave and essential response of free men to communist aggression.”¹⁹⁵ Reflecting upon the end of the Cold War, Arthur Schlesinger, author of the above quotation and the most venerated of orthodox historians, cast the conflict in unmistakably traditional terms. “The collapse of the ideological debate obviously concluded the Cold War,” he asserted. “Democracy has won the political argument between the East and the West.”¹⁹⁶ John Lewis Gaddis, at the forefront of the post-revisionist school, set the tone for the return to orthodoxy when he speculated:

Perhaps Harry Truman had it right after all: the struggle really was, ultimately, about two ways of life, one that abandoned freedom in its effort to rationalize politics, and another that was content to leave politics as the irrational process that it normally is, thereby preserving freedom. The idea of freedom proved more

¹⁹⁴ The return of orthodoxy and ideology to the center of the historiographical thinking on Moscow’s foreign policy motivation is discussed in Leffler, “The Cold War: What Do ‘We Now Know?’” *The American Historical Review* 104 (April 1999): 501-24; and Lundestad, “How (Not) To Study the Origins of the Cold War,” in *Reviewing the Cold War*, ed. Westad.

¹⁹⁵ Schlesinger, in Huthmacher and Susman, 43.

¹⁹⁶ Quoted in Alexei Filitov, “Victory in the Postwar Era: Despite the Cold War or Because of It?” in *The End of the Cold War: Its Meaning and Implications*, ed. Hogan. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 79. Filitov then proceeded to rebuke “the tendency of Schlesinger and others to equate the Cold War with the ideological debate between East and West.”

durable than the practice of authoritarianism, and as a consequence, the Cold War ended.¹⁹⁷

Of course, nearly all historians, regardless of interpretive stripe, never denied that the United States offered a greater degree of individual liberty to its citizens than did the now-defunct Soviet Union. They did dispute, however, whether or not freedom and its absence were truly at the root of the Cold War conflict. While (neo)orthodoxy attracted a large number of adherents, the other interpretive schools retained their persuasiveness for some historians. Realists followed Hans Morgenthau in criticizing the United States (and orthodox historians, for that matter) for imposing a legalistic-moralistic framework upon a fundamentally amoral conflict and thus losing sight of power realities. Revisionists tended to follow William Appleman Williams or Gabriel Kolko in criticizing the United States (and, again, orthodox historians) for inflating or otherwise manufacturing a communist threat to serve as a pretext for American economic and political ambitions. Post-revisionists continued to draw eclectically from the various interpretive positions, while emphasizing the security dilemma as the heart of the conflict.¹⁹⁸

However, (neo)orthodox historians claimed that the policies formulated by the United States in the early Cold War were vindicated by their eventual success against the forces of communism. The traditionalist arguments in support of containment, the Truman Doctrine, and the Marshall Plan were resuscitated by (neo)orthodox historians

¹⁹⁷ Gaddis, "The Cold War, the Long Peace, and the Future," in *End of the Cold War*, ed. Hogan, 28. In this article, Gaddis moved away from the power realities of realism and toward an emphasis on "freedom and its absence...the Cold War really was about the imposition of autocracy and the denial of freedom. That conflict came to an end only when it became clear that authoritarianism could no longer be imposed and freedom no longer be denied" (24). Certainly, the voices of Schlesinger and Feis reverberated through his claim that "the actions the United States took, through the Truman Doctrine, the Marshall Plan, and NATO, were seen at the time and I think will be seen by future historians as having preserved the idea of freedom in Europe by a narrow and precarious margin at a time when Europeans themselves, reeling from the effects of two world wars, had almost given up" (27). Gaddis does, however, retain an appreciation for the defensive impulses behind Soviet expansion (27), even if that aspect garners relatively little attention.

and seemingly given a new lease on life. Following from this, the totalitarian-ideological characterization of Soviet motivation, upon which the American policies were predicated, was also favored by the swelling ranks of (neo)orthodox scholars.¹⁹⁹ The operating logic of (neo)orthodoxy seemed to be that, if American foreign policy achieved its ostensible objective of defeating the Soviet Union, then those policies which led to that success could be deemed prudent. And, if those policies were prudent, then it stood to reason that the underlying assumptions about Soviet motivation which informed those policies were also correct. This rather seductive argument dovetailed with the attempts of some diplomatic historians to refurbish the Cold War narrative in light of the American triumph.²⁰⁰ In the estimation of (neo)orthodox scholars, it was the termination of the ideological contest that led to the dissolution of the Cold War; therefore, the traditionalist hypothesis that incongruous ideologies served as the catalyst for the conflict was given greater veracity. As John Mueller argued:

at base, the Cold War had much more to do with ideology than with armaments....it seems rather that the Cold War essentially sprang from the oft-proclaimed expansionary goals of communism: when these changed, everything changed, even though the bombs remained very much in place.²⁰¹

As Mueller's statement suggests, (neo)orthodox historians assumed that not only was the failure of communist ideology (at least as defined by the Soviet Union) necessary and sufficient to bring the Cold War to a close, but that it had been the main ingredient in the

¹⁹⁸ See Leffler, "The Cold War: What Do 'We Now Know,'" 501-24.

¹⁹⁹ For a favorable analysis of the role of containment and the Marshall Plan in preventing Soviet expansion, see Gaddis, *We Now Know*, 37-39. For critical commentary on the triumphalism that inheres in much of the Cold War diplomatic history published after the fall of the Soviet Union, see Michael H. Hunt, "The Three Realms Revisited," in *America in the World*, ed. Hogan, 152.

²⁰⁰ Or, to borrow a phrase from Bruce Cumings, perhaps their historical consciousnesses were informed by "the eye-opening endnote of victorious crowing and liberal self-congratulation" that marked the end of the Cold War. Cumings, "'Revising Postrevisionism' Revisited," in *America in the World*, ed. Hogan, 128.

²⁰¹ John Mueller, "Quiet Cataclysm: Some Afterthoughts on World War III," in *End of the Cold War*, ed. Hogan, 40.

confrontation since inception.²⁰² Schlesinger, musing upon the dissolution of the Cold War, followed a similar line: “The ideological confrontation gave the geopolitical rivalry its religious intensity, [and] so the collapse of the ideological debate took any apocalyptic point out of the Cold War.”²⁰³

The return of traditionalism to interpretive dominance within the field had important consequences for how the problem of Soviet motivation was addressed in narratives of the Cold War. (Neo)orthodox historians restored the Soviet Union to the role of primary instigator. Stalin was once again cast as the paranoid ideologue *par excellence*, possessed of grandiose desires for world revolution, an opportunistic lust for power, and devious schemes for communist subversion. As Gaddis cautioned of “Marxist-Leninist authoritarians” such as Stalin, “these were not hard-nosed realists but...brutal romantics.”²⁰⁴ The post-Cold War traditionalists argued that Soviet foreign policy had not been motivated by the norms of realistic state conduct, but rather was founded upon the unreasonable security demands and expansionistic imperative intrinsic to totalitarian regimes.²⁰⁵

Among the arguments that (neo)orthodoxy revitalized was the notion that Soviet objectives for the postwar world were largely predetermined in accordance with Marxist-Leninist ideology. If Soviet plans for aggressive expansion were in place prior to the Cold War, and were of the limitless nature that many Western leaders feared, this would

²⁰² Gaddis, “The Cold War, The Long Peace, and the Future,” 28. He wrote: “The way the Cold War ended, therefore, was directly related to the way in which it had begun.”

²⁰³ Schlesinger, “Some Lessons from the Cold War,” in *End of the Cold War*, ed. Hogan, 61.

²⁰⁴ Gaddis, “The Tragedy of Cold War History,” *Diplomatic History* 17, no. 1 (Winter 1993), 10-12.

²⁰⁵ Mastny, *The Cold War and Soviet Insecurity*, 195. Mastny described Stalin’s objective in the international arena as an “insatiable quest for security at the price of everybody else’s insecurity.” With regard to the totalitarian nature of the Soviet Union, Mastny explained that, during Stalin’s reign, “Soviet policy was for all intents and purposes his policy....This was the time when the Soviet system came the closest to the ideal model of totalitarian autocracy” (191).

validate the argument that the satellitization of Eastern Europe by the Soviet Union was but the first phase in a larger project aimed at global dominance. However, if the evidence suggested the absence of such intentions, or the imposition of definite limits upon expansion that correlated with Russia's historic security concerns, this would cast doubt upon the orthodox-totalitarian argument that Soviet expansion was offensive in orientation and unlimited in scope. The orthodox view generally held that plans for radical Soviet expansion were much more than a glimmer in Stalin's eye during the Second World War.²⁰⁶ His objectives were informed by a remarkable merger of inherited ideas that included both Leninist revolution and Tsarist imperialism. Vladislav Zubok and Constantine Pleshakov explained that "the promise of Communist revolutionary nationalism combined with the necessities of survival for the Soviet Union" served as the "lodestar" guiding Stalin's visions, plans, and expectations for the international order.²⁰⁷ Universalism and nationalism were two sides of the same coin, according to this argument. As the center of the communist movement, the pursuit of Russian national interests was equated with the survival of revolutionary ideals. Stalin, according to Zubok and Pleshakov, "wanted security, not cohabitation, liquidation of the bourgeoisie, not trade, and this required ultimate and undiluted control over territories and, ipso facto, control over the population."²⁰⁸ While Stalin was unsure of the precise extent of the Soviet sphere of influence, according to Gaddis, the dictator was always guided by a vision of world revolution. "What all this suggests," this prominent post-revisionist-

²⁰⁶ R.C. Raack, *Stalin's Drive to the West, 1938-1945: The Origins of the Cold War* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 160. Raack argued that the new evidence from Eastern bloc archives "at last make clear the connection of the [Cold War's] origins with the Soviet *Drang nach Westen* of 1944-45" (3). Author's emphasis.

²⁰⁷ Zubok and Constantine Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War: From Stalin to Khrushchev* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 12.

²⁰⁸ Zubok and Pleshakov, 16-17.

turned-traditionalist wrote in *We Now Know*, “is not that Stalin had limited ambitions, only that he had no timetable for achieving them.”²⁰⁹ Tucker marshaled new evidence on the Cominform in order to assert that plans for this “mechanism for ideological coordination and control” of non-Russian communist parties had been in existence well in advance of the various American policies which were sometimes presumed to have provoked the Kremlin to re-establish the coordinating institution in the first place.²¹⁰

Stalin himself re-emerged as the frightful demon of orthodoxy, once again propelling the Soviet Union in accordance with his “ideologically driven appetite for foreign adventure.”²¹¹ No longer the cautious, security-minded practitioner of *realpolitik*, the dictator, (neo)orthodox historians argued, was driven by “illusions and wishful thinking” that produced a romantic adventurism of global proportions.²¹² Tucker was particularly forceful in his condemnation of the dictator as the central factor that pushed the Cold War down its tragic path. Stalin was:

a Russian imperial Communist bent on aggrandizing the Soviet empire where possible.... As his reign approached its end, he intensified the Cold War to a level that presaged an early break in relations with the United States and the possibility of war with the West. His death was the event that liberated Russia and the rest of humanity from this mortal danger.²¹³

However, despite some miscalculations that inadvertently provoked American intervention, Zubok and Pleshakov maintained that Stalin “was not prepared to take a course of unbridled unilateral expansionism after World War II. He wanted to avoid

²⁰⁹ Gaddis, *We Now Know*, 30-31.

²¹⁰ Tucker, 275. “It is clear that the Marshall Plan, the Truman Doctrine, and other international events of 1947 simply constituted a convenient backdrop for acting on an idea [the use of communist institutions for coordinating all communist parties in accordance with the Kremlin line] formed in Stalin’s mind in advance of them.”

²¹¹ Raack, 5.

²¹² Mastny, *The Cold War and Soviet Insecurity*, 193.

²¹³ Tucker, 281.

confrontation with the West.”²¹⁴ Of necessity, Stalin had to temper his internationalist ambitions with cautious opportunism owing to the material weakness and disarray suffered by the Soviet Union in the aftermath of the Second World War. In this regard, (neo)orthodox historians attributed to Stalin a treacherous cunning for the manner in which he played the Allies to his advantage during and immediately after the war. “To Stalin, whatever emerged from the hectic circumstances in vague resolutions...surely appeared to assist his way of ultimately gaining his expansive ends de facto,” wrote Raack. “The vagueness appeared to leave open the possibility of his taking even more, once the Western leaders had gone home.”²¹⁵ According to (neo)orthodoxy, when Soviet behavior appeared reasonable or rational, the world was bearing witness to Stalin’s cunning duplicity in action, as he misled his allies in the West about his motives.

Ideas, and more specifically ideology, had been eschewed by most non-orthodox scholars as a plausible explanation of Soviet behavior, relegated to a position of secondary or tertiary importance. Under the dominant realist paradigm, as Westad observed, “there was little room for the role of ideas or culture in general, and ideology was a bad word.”²¹⁶ Gaddis noted that scholarship during the Cold War, with the exception of the orthodox interpretation, “emphasized *interests*, which it mostly defined in material terms.... It tended to overlook *ideas*.”²¹⁷ However, research in communist archives indicated to many historians that ideology may have informed Soviet foreign

²¹⁴ Zubok and Pleshakov, 278.

²¹⁵ Raack, 151.

²¹⁶ Westad, “Secrets of the Second World,” 264.

²¹⁷ Gaddis, *We Now Know*, 282. Author’s emphasis. See also Ninkovich, “Where Have All The Realists Gone? [Review of *The Ambiguous Legacy: U.S. Foreign Policy in the ‘American Century,’* edited by Michael J. Hogan]” *Diplomatic History* 26, no. 1 (Winter 2002), 142. Here, Ninkovich wrote that, while “diplomatic history has long taken international conflict and power politics as its problematic,” it has apparently undergone “a major shift away from the realist ‘rise to world power’ approach and its economic doppelganger, orientations that used to stress issues of war and peace and hard economic motives.”

policy to a greater extent than had previously been surmised. At the very least, ideological language permeated many of the archival documents, although the extent to which it was actually representative of official thinking remained open to debate. Perhaps, as Westad pondered, the explanatory capability of ideational factors had been prematurely discarded by diplomatic historians.²¹⁸ The new evidence on Soviet conduct seemed to provide a “window” on the worldview and cultural logic of the decision makers which led Westad to argue:

The elements of Marxism that Lenin and Stalin underlined became integral parts of how the Soviet elite saw the world. They held class struggle to be the dynamic force in social and political development and used it to analyze politics abroad.... They saw contradictions among capitalist countries as the main cause of war and expected the effects of this rivalry to favor the cause of left-wing parties and movements. They postulated the ultimate victory of socialism as unavoidable and thought time was on their side in the battle for the hearts and minds of the world's population.²¹⁹

In similar fashion, Mastny contended that, while ideology did not determine Soviet foreign policy in a strict sense, it did lead to a “tendency to expect the worst from the capitalists” and thus “reinforced the disposition of those [Soviet diplomats] abroad to overstate, for their own protection, the possibility of the worst case scenario.”²²⁰ Gaddis pushed the role of ideas even further with his claim that the “new sources...seem to suggest that ideology often *determined* the behavior of Marxist-Leninist regimes: it was not simply a justification for actions already decided upon.”²²¹ While such views did not necessarily preclude the role of *realpolitik*, they tended to accord the latter a tactical role

²¹⁸ Westad, “Secrets of the Second World,” 267.

²¹⁹ Westad, “Secrets of the Second World,” 265. See also Macdonald, 157, where communist ideology and its role in Soviet behavior was treated in a more orthodox fashion.

²²⁰ Mastny, *The Cold War and Soviet Insecurity*, 59. Mastny noted the example of Moscow's ambassador to Washington who in mid-1948 reported to the Kremlin that Washington was in the grip of a “war psychosis” directed at the U.S.S.R.

²²¹ Gaddis, *We Now Know*, 290.

in service of an overarching Marxist-Leninist strategy.²²² This argument contravened realist analyses, which held that the Soviet Union – like most other great power states – used ideology as a rhetorical instrument in order to justify the pursuit of its (specifically, Russian) national interests.

The return to an emphasis upon ideology carried with it important implications for how Soviet motivation was conceived, and how evidence was evaluated. Given the nature of Marxist-Leninism, with its emphasis upon the international class struggle and the instinctive hostility of capitalist states, the decision by (neo)traditionalist historians to attribute greater weight to the more ideologically-infused statements made by Soviet officials implied a far more ambitious set of intentions than those derived from the Soviet Union’s material capabilities and the tenets of realistic state behavior. For those historians who accorded primacy to documents infused with Marxist-Leninist language, revolutionary romanticism took precedence over *realpolitik* as the driving force of the Kremlin’s behavior on the international stage.²²³ By elevating Marxist-Leninist ideology, diplomatic historians explained why the Soviet Union may have conducted itself with little regard for the “relative power positions of the respective states” in the international arena, as well as why it chose to pursue alliances with states of a similar ideological posture even if Russian national interests were not being strategically advanced. In this view, the driving force of “totalist” regimes like the U.S.S.R. was a “desire to create

²²² While the notion that Soviet motivation was a function of Tsarist expansion and Leninist revolution was not particularly original, its most recent incarnation was described as the “revolutionary-imperial paradigm” by Zubok and Pleshakov in *Inside the Kremlin’s Cold War*. “It would be wrong to interpret Communist behavior in the world arena in terms of either geopolitics or ideology. We prefer to conceive of this conduct as the result of the symbiosis of imperial expansionism and ideological proselytism” (3). While Zubok and Pleshakov took do allude to Western policies as contributing to the Cold War (275), the fact remains that the concept emphasized ideas and intentions over material capabilities and *realpolitik* as the underlying forces of Soviet foreign policy.

²²³ Westad, “Secrets of the Second World,” 263.

compatible regimes in the world...necessary for both ideological and security reasons,” Macdonald argued.²²⁴

The assumptions inherent in the totalitarian-ideological characterizations of Soviet motivation as written early in the Cold War were also reproduced in the (neo)orthodox historical literature that emerged after the conflict had run its course. Such leaps of interpretive faith were intrinsic to every characterization of Soviet motivation regardless of school, and were part and parcel of the attempt by historians to link an abstract concept – in this case, Soviet state motivation – to particular events. While the act of attributing intentionality to the various state actors was necessary in order to imbue the Cold War with meaning, the fact remained that there had always been multiple characterizations of Soviet motivation available in historical discourse, and diplomatic historians were faced with a choice among these competing views. The mere choosing, however, entailed certain consequences for how the Cold War was conceptualized. Thus, understanding the consequences of and assumptions in (neo)orthodoxy, as with the other schools, permits a better understanding of what this perspective might disclose, and also what it might conceal.

A problem with the return to orthodoxy was that a central assumption of the totalitarian thesis and its application to the Soviet Union remained unanswered: the relationship between domestic and foreign policy. The new evidence did confirm that the Soviet Union’s domestic policy was as brutal and repressive as the totalitarian thesis had suspected. However, the nature of the Soviet domestic system had rarely been a matter of disagreement among the different schools of diplomatic history. Much more contentious had been the assertion that a totalitarian domestic policy necessarily

²²⁴ Macdonald, 162.

produced a totalitarian foreign policy.²²⁵ Advocates of totalitarianism as the driving factor in Moscow's international behavior held to this argument, which had important ramifications for the analyses that followed. First, they argued that a totalitarian domestic policy necessarily produced a totalitarian foreign policy. Second, as National Socialist Germany and the Soviet Union were both totalitarian, there was a fundamental similarity in the expansionist drives of both countries. This implied that the United States and other Western powers would be best served by policies which did not repeat the same mistakes made in the late 1930s with respect to Hitler and Germany. Gaddis appeared to lead the charge in resuscitating this argument, noting that "the similarities between Stalin and Hitler far outweigh the differences....[T]hey were not to be swayed from their ultimate objectives.... And, most important, they both had visions of security for themselves that meant complete insecurity for everyone else."²²⁶ For Gaddis, it was pointless to distinguish between the different aspects of Stalin's leadership, be it his domestic rule, his foreign policy, or his interpersonal conduct: they were all fundamentally similar.²²⁷ The argument that foreign policy and domestic policy were cut from the same cloth in any totalitarian state drove to the crux of the (neo)orthodox explanation for the Soviet Union's expansionary motives. It implied distinct views on how best to engage the Soviet Union in the international arena – views which were based on inferences drawn from the Western democracies' experience with Hitler. Should the Soviet Union, at least during the early Cold War period, be regarded as insatiably expansionistic in the same manner as National Socialist Germany? If so, then the give-and-take of traditional diplomacy would ultimately prove futile. If the U.S.S.R. did not

²²⁵ Arendt, 393-98.

²²⁶ Gaddis, "Tragedy of Cold War History," 10-11.

possess “normal” state interests, but rather the unlimited aspirations of a totalitarian state, then attempts to negotiate with Moscow or concede certain “reasonable” security demands would only expedite the tragic process while permitting the number of democratic nations to dwindle. In this view, only an ambitious policy such as containment could hope to staunch Soviet expansion.

Furthermore, the focus on the Soviet Union and its ideology compelled (neo)orthodox historians to move away from the interactive, defense-oriented model that post-revisionists used in order to explain superpower relations. There was a return to the older action-reaction model that, following traditionalist views, positioned the U.S.S.R. as the aggressor.²²⁸ The move away from the interactive model reintroduced many of the problems afflicting the orthodox-revisionist debate that post-revisionism had attempted to resolve. Most notably, the action-reaction model brought with it a tendency to assign blame, whereas the interactive model tended to emphasize mutual responsibility. While the action-reaction model considered international relations in terms of offensive and defensive nations, the interactive model highlighted the security dilemma as the central component of the superpower conflict. While determining responsibility for conflict is perhaps an inextricable aspect of writing diplomatic history, the action-reaction model tended to encourage the portrayal of one nation as consistently aggressive and the other as consistently defensive. As Douglas Macdonald argued,

Soviet attempts to expand into the region [Asia] were made, not in response to Western threats, as security dilemma critiques of containment suggest, but because of the lack of...a unified Western containment policy. Moreover, Soviet bloc actions in Asia strongly suggest that had robust containment policies not

²²⁷ Gaddis, *We Now Know*, 293.

²²⁸ Leffler, “Bringing It Together: The Parts and the Whole,” in *Reviewing the Cold War*, ed. Westad, 47; Lundestad, “How (Not) To Study the Origins of the Cold War,” 71.

been followed in Europe and the Middle East, the Soviets would have tried to expand their influence into those areas also.²²⁹

The new traditionalists returned to representing the United States in a reactive role, as the only nation capable of serving as a bulwark against Soviet aggression. For scholars such as Macdonald, who accepted the characterization of the Soviet Union as insatiably expansionistic and aggressive, the validity of containment as a prudent American response to Russian behavior was presumed correct: “The Soviets expanded into Asia not in reaction to Western provocations or fear of Western expansion...but because of a combination of the lack of Western actions and the existence of ideologically driven opportunism, as traditionalism more clearly predicts.”²³⁰

For historians who adopted a (neo)orthodox position, the focus shifted to Soviet aggression, while glossing over aspects of American foreign policy that may have appeared threatening to the Soviet leadership. Often, any such threat from the capitalist West was discounted as little more than a figment of Stalin’s paranoia or as the cynical manufacture of an external capitalist threat in order to justify harsh domestic policies. As Michael Hunt lamented, the return to orthodoxy generally resulted in a tendency for “those [diplomatic historians] most comfortable with American state papers not just to see the world through the eyes of the men who generated those papers but to see the field in terms most compatible with the outlook of those men.”²³¹ The implications of this view for how Soviet motives were represented is clear: the United States was accurate in

²²⁹ Macdonald, 153. Similarly, Gaddis pondered whether, “Given...[Stalin’s] combination of appetite with aversion to risk, one cannot help but wonder what would have happened had the West tried containment earlier.” Gaddis, *We Now Know*, 31.

²³⁰ Macdonald, 185.

²³¹ Hunt, 152.

its perception of a Soviet-communist menace and justified in the policies that it formulated to counteract this peril.

The return of the traditionalist interpretation to a position of historiographical prominence, in conjunction with the spate of new documentary sources from communist archives, led to increased emphasis on the aggressive nature of Soviet behavior and its role in provoking the superpower conflict. Some historians went so far as to claim that the documentary evidence (of course, as it was used in their respective narratives) was definitive. Raack seemed to make this claim when he wrote: "We owe it to history itself, to reconstruct the past not as some have wished it to be, or as too many have described it to be, but as the sources show it to have been."²³² Most were not so bold as to make such an authoritative declaration, but nevertheless wrote in such a fashion.²³³ As in the past, there was a tendency to embrace the arguments and assumptions of a particular interpretive position without considering the plausibility of opposing views. The tendency to presume that support for one interpretation would simply disprove competing interpretations as a matter of course persisted.

While some historians claimed to find compelling archival evidence to support the view that Russian expansion was impelled by totalitarian ideology, other historians did not agree that the orthodox interpretation was necessarily the best means of accommodating the new sources. As Melvyn Leffler argued, ideology as the *primum mobile* of Soviet behavior was not the only plausible interpretation supported by research in communist archives. The significance of *realpolitik* to Soviet activity could also be

²³² Raack, 10.

²³³ For cautionary words about this temptation, see Robert D. English, "Sources, Methods, and Competing Perspectives," *Diplomatic History* 21, no. 2 (Spring 1997), 283. English cautioned that an "overreliance on

supported by the new evidence. Moreover, Leffler contended, the possibility that Soviet expansion was defensive rather than aggressive was also conceivable in light of archival research.²³⁴ There remained considerable ground to argue for quite divergent notions of Soviet motivation and action. While a particular interpretation, (neo)orthodoxy, found favor among many diplomatic historians, its arguments did not exhaust the meaning that could be extracted from the new evidence.

While there was a gravitation toward the orthodox thesis, attempts to refute competing theories of Soviet motivation were not particularly successful. There were numerous demonstrations that the new evidence supported a particular interpretation, but attempts to disprove alternative arguments were dubious. Concluding that the orthodox view was vindicated by the new evidence, Macdonald claimed that “the primary reason” for the “resurgence of the traditional viewpoint is that a good deal of the new evidence has not been kind to post-revisionist, realist, and especially revisionist analyses.” However, he offered little consideration of competing points of view and tended to select evidence that supported traditionalist arguments, as if that were sufficient to prove that the other schools had taken on considerable water as a result of the revelations provided by the new sources.²³⁵ What was generally overlooked, of course, was that historians from each of the major interpretive schools proclaimed the validity of their respective arguments and offered plausible interpretations to that effect. William Wohlforth observed that “orthodox, revisionist, and post-revisionist historical interpretations of the Cold War...could all simultaneously find support in the specialist literature on Soviet

the new sources” may lead to a “temptation to view Politburo, Central Committee, or Foreign Ministry records as definitive in and of themselves.”

²³⁴ Leffler, “The Cold War: What Do ‘We Now Know,’” 501-24.

²³⁵ Macdonald, 157.

foreign policy.”²³⁶ Though diminished in number, the ranks of realist and revisionist scholars continued to mount effective, even daunting, rebuttals, against the assumptions of (neo)orthodoxy.

There were no definitive attempts to disprove revisionism on its own terms. Its failure was often presumed a *fait accompli* by non-revisionist historians, who had long discounted it as little more than an epiphenomenon of current events that would fade into obscurity as its contemporary relevance diminished. “We have turned a set of criticisms [specifically, William A. Williams’ critique of U.S. foreign policy] that might have been appropriate for particular policies at a particular time and place into something approaching a universal frame of reference.” This, lamented Gaddis, “distorts our understanding of our place in the world, and also of ourselves.”²³⁷ Contemporary revisionists indicated otherwise. Bruce Cumings quipped that “Russia is now [after the Cold War] seen for what many ‘revisionists’ always argued it to be, a regional power of the second rank...inflated out of all proportion by the hot air of Cold War ideology.”²³⁸ Ronald Steel maintained the common revisionist thesis that Washington had inflated the Soviet threat in order to justify U.S. ambitions to audiences at home and allies abroad. “The Cold War was not simply a response to Soviet expansion,” Steel explained, “but the framework by which American policy makers were able to extend globally the reach of American power and influence....Without the Soviet factor such a policy would never have been able to achieve the wide scale public support it required.”²³⁹ What revisionists

²³⁶ Wohlforth, 232.

²³⁷ Gaddis, “Tragedy of Cold War History,” 15.

²³⁸ Cumings, “The Wicked Witch of the West is Dead. Long Live the Wicked Witch of the East,” in *The End of the Cold War*, ed. Hogan, 89.

²³⁹ Ronald Steel, “The End and the Beginning,” in *The End of the Cold War*, ed. Hogan, 108.

claimed to find in the new evidence was confirmation for their argument that the Soviet Union was not the threat that the United States had made it out to be.²⁴⁰

Realism, with its emphasis upon national interests, material capabilities, and balances of power, also fell into conceptual disfavor among many historians in the post-Cold War era. The explanatory capacity of realist theory was given a significant demotion as (neo)orthodox historians revived the emphasis upon ideology as the most significant motive for Moscow's foreign policy.²⁴¹ However, as Frank Ninkovich wrote, "it seems clear that, despite the shift [to a focus on Soviet ideology], questions about security, the economy, and the nature of American influence remain very much open" to further inquiry and debate.²⁴² In other words, the central problems addressed by realist historians in the past remained unresolved and required further study. To this end, Sergei Goncharov, John Lewis, and Xue Litai suggested that the claim that Moscow's foreign policy was based upon *realpolitik* could be sustained in light of the new evidence. Following the realist thesis on the nature of Marxist-Leninist ideology in Soviet policy discourse, they suggested that ideology was used in an instrumental fashion in order to conceal "naked military-political interests and a priority for national security" behind a veil of idealistic rhetoric.²⁴³

The issue of the Kremlin's motives and how they related to Soviet behavior on the world stage remained central to historiographical debate. Diplomatic historians continued to face a bevy of competing and often contradictory characterizations of

²⁴⁰ Steel, 107. Steel expressed serious doubts about the role of ideology in Soviet foreign policy: "We now know more about the Soviet Union than we did before: its inner weakness, both material and psychological....This was not a state inspired by a proselytizing ideology, as so many of our political leaders and ostensible experts told us."

²⁴¹ For example, Gaddis, *We Now Know*, 289-91. For a critique of this tendency, see Lundestad, "How (Not) To Study the Origins of the Cold War," 72-74.

²⁴² Ninkovich, "Where Have All The Realists Gone?" 142.

Moscow's intentions. Certainly, research in communist archives provided color, nuance, and sophistication to narrative histories of the early Cold War; however, it did not offer incontrovertible support for any single understanding of Soviet motivation. Nor did it rout competing conceptions. While there was an increasing willingness to attribute greater truth-value to documents brimming with Marxist-Leninist language, other evidence in the archives emphasized the concerns of *realpolitik*. A significant gap thus remained in the relationship between the documentary traces of the past available to the historian and the various characterizations of Soviet motivation. This gap had to be traversed in order to write effective and meaningful narratives of the Cold War.

However, the source material drawn from communist archives was open to a multitude of divergent interpretations, each finding support for its major arguments in the primary sources while accommodating discrepant information in a methodologically plausible manner. The choice that a given historian made among these competing characterizations had a significant impact upon the frame of reference within which documents were evaluated and past events imbued with meaning. As such, the nature of this choice among competing views of Soviet motivation must be given its analytical due as a central factor in the historiography of the early Cold War period.

²⁴³ Goncharov et al., 219.

Conclusion: Diplomatic History And The Ontology Of The Soviet State

In spite of the influx of direct documentary sources on the inner workings of the Kremlin, the motivation behind its behavior remained elusive to diplomatic historians. Competing and often contradictory definitions of Moscow's foreign policy objectives continued to circulate in historical discourse, each deriving validation from the archives. The controversy over Soviet motivation could not be easily isolated from related issues; it was deeply implicated in how diplomatic historians thought and wrote about the early Cold War. The manner in which scholars assigned intentionality to Moscow's behavior had a direct bearing on the meaning and significance attributed to the documentary evidence and how this evidence was used to support a particular interpretation. However, attempts to explore these competing interpretations with an eye to their consequences for historiography were relatively rare. In those instances where the assumptions about Soviet motives made by diplomatic historians were addressed, the analysis tended to focus on how *other* historians had a distorted view of the Cold War based upon *their* faulty premises. Little attention was spent exploring the conceptual fuzziness that *all* diplomatic historians encountered as they grappled with the slippery problem of Moscow's motivation.

While research in communist archives significantly enriched historical accounts of Moscow's diplomatic behavior, no incontrovertible evidence was found in support of any particular understanding of the Kremlin's motives. Nor did archival research uncover documentary evidence capable of routing competing conceptions. The new sources on Soviet foreign policy ensured that diplomatic historians would no longer have to contend with a "black box" situation in which the inner workings of Moscow's

diplomatic machinery was a matter of complete speculation; however, the partial resolution of this problem did not settle the matter of how the new evidence should be used by the historian. Diplomatic historians continued to face a fundamental choice about how to interpret Soviet behavior. Embedded in each choice was a set of assumptions about the nature of Soviet foreign policy. These assumptions enabled diplomatic historians to confer meaning upon the outwardly manifest behavior of the communist superpower and provided an interpretive framework for dealing with archival evidence pertaining to its internal operation.

The choice faced by diplomatic historians may be reduced to two competing ontologies of Soviet foreign policy: an abnormal ontology, which emphasized the totalitarian-ideological motives powering Moscow's behavior; and a normal state ontology, which stressed *realpolitik* as the strategic blueprint for its activity. Orthodox historians held to an ontologically abnormal characterization of the Kremlin's foreign policy. According to this view, Soviet behavior did not conform to the way that a normal state acted in the international arena. Rather, it was guided by a revolutionary ideology and a totalitarian compulsion for limitless expansion. In contrast, realists, revisionists, and most post-revisionists held that Soviet foreign policy was ontologically normal. They maintained that the Kremlin operated on the basis of realistic principles of state conduct. In other words, Soviet intentions were cut from the same cloth as other great power nations. The pursuit of Russia's historic national (security) interests, relative to a rational calculation of the international distribution of power, was at the root of Stalin's foreign policy. Both ontologies of the Soviet state produced compelling but divergent explanations for the same events. There were, of course, significant and substantial

differences among historians of the same ontological mode. However, most of these differences involved the prudence of particular U.S. policies toward the Soviet Union, and not the more basic question of the ontology of Moscow's foreign policy upon which those policies were predicated. For instance, while conservative and liberal factions of the orthodox school debated whether the United States should contain the spread of communism or adopt a more proactive policy of "rolling back" the U.S.S.R., there was little debate over the belief that traditional diplomacy could not effectively halt Soviet expansion and that extraordinary means were required in order to counteract the Kremlin's ambitions. Similarly, while realists and revisionists disputed whether the United States should negotiate with the Soviet Union from a position of power or simply disengage from areas of Soviet interest, both agreed that traditional diplomacy could deal effectively with the Soviet Union. In support of these explanations, both ontological modes referenced a similar body of historical evidence in a reasonably judicious manner. The outcome was a range of characterizations of the Kremlin's motives that could only be described as strikingly dissimilar. How could this occur?

At the level of archival research, these conceptions of Soviet state identity were sufficiently flexible to accommodate discrepant source material. Implicit in both ontological modes was an hierarchical model in which various motive factors could be arranged. This hierarchy of motives provided the basic framework within which diplomatic historians conducted their archival research. A greater truth-value was attributed to those documents that contained themes ranked higher within the chosen hierarchy, while lesser themes were discounted. Diplomatic historians made use of a variety of techniques in order to explain why particular types of source material were (or

were not) representative of Soviet motives. Those documentary traces of the past containing information that ranked near the bottom of a given hierarchy could readily be explained as aberration or anomaly, as the operational jargon of a diplomatic corps that acted in one way and spoke in another, or as the product of Moscow's misinformation machine.

For instance, when Kremlin officials referenced Marxist-Leninist ideas of international revolution, orthodox historians viewed the use of this language as an accurate statement of Soviet intent. While Moscow's security objectives and *realpolitik* practices were generally acknowledged by traditionalist historians, such motives were discounted as merely the first step in a much more ambitious programme. In an article on the motives of Soviet foreign policy published in 1960, Zbigniew Brzezinski explained how *realpolitik* was subordinate to ideology:

The universality...of Soviet foreign policy also makes it clear that, while the concept of "national interest" may not be irrelevant to an understanding of Communist foreign policy, to be useful, it must be linked to the ultimate ideological objective. As far as Communist leaders are concerned, Soviet national interest is that which increases the power and the capability of the U.S.S.R. to promote communism.²⁴⁴

However, scholars who adhered to a normal ontology of Soviet foreign policy explained that Marxist-Leninist references were a sophisticated rhetoric designed to obscure the pursuit of Russian national interests behind a universalistic justification. Defending the primacy of *realpolitik* in Moscow's foreign policy, Samuel Sharp claimed:

The objection will still be raised that the Soviet leaders mouth every policy decision in terms of ideological aims.... [However, since] the Soviet leaders'

²⁴⁴ Zbigniew Brzezinski, "Communist Ideology: Key to Soviet Policy," in *The Cold War*, ed. Graebner, 49. First published as "Communist Ideology and International Affairs," in *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 4 (September, 1960), 266-90.

claim to rule rests on their perpetuation of the ideology...they have no choice but to continue paying lip service to the doctrine, even if it is no longer operative.²⁴⁵

Thus, even when ideological language was found in the sources from communist archives, it could be accorded a secondary rank with negligible impact on the formulation of Moscow's foreign policy. In this view, to the extent that ideology did influence Soviet foreign policy, it caused Kremlin officials to (mis)perceive the behavior of capitalist nations as threatening and, consequently, to pursue Russia's national (security) interests with increased zeal.²⁴⁶ Both normal and abnormal state ontologies integrated elements of its opposite, but gave these elements a subordinate ranking in the hierarchy of motives. As a result, it was inordinately difficult to test the validity of the competing ontologies against each other on the basis of available source material, for both capably accommodated discordant historical evidence and responded to the challenges of its rival.

The manner in which Soviet motivation was characterized had important implications for how its relationship with the United States was understood. If the Soviet Union followed an ontologically abnormal foreign policy, traditional diplomatic techniques would be largely ineffectual, even counter-productive. The only prudent response could be a vigilant policy of containment or rollback. In contrast, revisionists, realists, and post-revisionists advanced a different set of recommendations about how the United States should deal with the Soviet Union. These arguments were based on the claim that the Kremlin pursued an ontologically normal foreign policy. That is, Soviet ambitions were generally commensurate with Russian national interests, which were

²⁴⁵ Sharp, 74.

²⁴⁶ For an overview of recent literature that examines the *realpolitik* aspects of Soviet foreign policy, see Leffler, "The Cold War: What Do 'We Now Know,'" 512-17. For an earlier realist explanation of how ideology might affect Soviet foreign policy without necessarily infringing upon its realistic orientation, see Sharp, 73-74.

security-oriented and calculated on the basis of a rational appraisal of the geopolitical system. By accepting that view, the United States' early Cold War foreign policy was probably not the best response.²⁴⁷ Dealing with the Soviet Union on the basis of traditional diplomacy, so the argument went, might have reduced tensions and led to a realistic settlement based upon national interests.

Diplomatic historians could not escape the necessary methodological evil of assigning motives to Soviet behavior. Lacking an understanding of the intentional dimension of Moscow's actions, however defined, would greatly diminish the historian's ability to write an intelligible narrative of the period. A decision on the most appropriate characterization of Soviet foreign affairs had to be undertaken if the historian was to understand the significance of documents and events. What made this problem particularly daunting was that several contradictory characterizations of the U.S.S.R.'s foreign policy existed in historical discourse, each offering methodologically plausible but highly divergent interpretations for the same events and sources. As more than one plausible view on the nature of Soviet motivation was available in historical discourse, the choice between these competing characterizations was not self-evident. Some historians may have been more assured of their views than others but, at the historiographical level, choice did exist. What needs to be considered, then, is why and how particular views of Soviet motivation were in turn elevated to a position of

²⁴⁷ The critique of American policy differed between realists and revisionists in important respects. Most realists believed that American policy makers were naïve but sincere in their legalistic-moralistic principles while most revisionists argued that anti-communism and containment served as the pretext for U.S. economic and political ambitions. Post-revisionists attempted to strike a balance between realism and revisionism by acknowledging that American decision makers were probably sincere in their beliefs but occasionally mistaken in their perception of the Soviet threat. Despite this, there was general agreement about the motives behind Soviet expansion as ontologically normal, and thus the possibility that it could have been more effectively engaged on the basis of traditional diplomacy.

prominence within the field and the implications that this held for the writing of Cold War history.

In this regard, what is most significant is the manner in which the ascendancy of particular views of Soviet motivation mirrored contemporary sentiment in the West, especially in the United States. As Alexander Dallin once quipped, “American attitudes and views...have often revealed more about the United States than about the U.S.S.R.” He claimed that there was “an empirically observable congruence between the political temper of the times and the general thrust of dominant interpretations” of the Soviet Union.²⁴⁸ Throughout the late 1940s and the early 1950s, there was a general consensus on the role that the United States should be playing vis-à-vis the Soviet Union, and this was reflected in the orthodox interpretation. In the 1960s, as domestic consensus fragmented over the Vietnam crisis, revisionist arguments became popular for a growing numbers of historians who doubted the underlying rationale for American involvement in Vietnam and the Cold War more generally. Many challenged the orthodox portrayal of the United States as the bulwark against communism and explored alternative motives for both American and Soviet behavior. In the early 1970s, with the onset of détente, post-revisionism emerged as an attempt to transcend the orthodox-revisionist feud by moving away from debate over the responsibility for igniting the conflict. In the early 1990s, with the collapse of the Soviet Union, (neo)orthodoxy recouped the main features of the traditionalist interpretation in a manner that was apparently informed more by the

²⁴⁸ Alexander Dallin, “Bias and Blunders in American Studies on the U.S.S.R.,” *Slavic Studies* 32, no. 3 (September 1973), 560, 565. While primarily a critique of the state of Sovietology at the time, Dallin also discussed how “the shifting winds of public moods” have affected “the specialist’s assessments of the U.S.S.R. (and not only of its present but also of its past),” 566.

American victory in the Cold War than it was by the access to new archival evidence.²⁴⁹ It was not the case, of course, that individual historians simply produced texts that served as a weathervane responsive to popular sentiment. Revisionists such as William Appleman Williams had texts published well prior to the Vietnam crisis, and numerous works demonstrated some similarity to post-revisionism in advance of the *détente* era. However, beyond the level of individual historians, interpretive schools rose and fell in a manner that seemed to reflect contemporary situations in the West to an unmistakable degree. The various historiographical approaches to the Cold War did not simply arise *ex nihilo* according to fickle contemporary desires to re-cast the past in a more usable form; rather, the tenets of the major interpretive schools were “latent” in the historiography, awaiting the right conditions in the present in order to develop into a full-fledged school of interpretation or assume a position of dominance within the field.

Perhaps there is no clearer manifestation of this phenomenon than the manner in which historical narratives connected the patterns of the past to recommendations for a more effective American foreign policy in the present. The orthodox characterization of Soviet motives as totalitarian-ideological in nature justified the ambitious anti-communist programs that the United States undertook. Schlesinger used this characterization in order to explain why lesser policy options would fail, both in the past and in the present:

Marxism has identified capitalism as the specific source of aggression and evil. It is this fact which exposes most sharply the shallowness of the argument that a different U.S. policy might have won the confidence of the Kremlin. For, so long as American remains a capitalist democracy, no American policy can win basic Soviet confidence.²⁵⁰

²⁴⁹ This argument is made in Lundestad, “How (Not) To Study the Origins of the Cold War,” 67-68. He writes, “one cannot help but notice the close connection between the interpretations of the historians on the one hand and important political events on the other. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the victory of the West brought the Cold War to an end. This easily led to the conclusion that the Soviet Union must have caused the Cold War.”

²⁵⁰ Schlesinger, *Vital Center*, 99.

Conversely, diplomatic historians who maintained that the Soviet Union was realistic in its foreign policy objectives argued that traditional diplomacy was the most effective means to deal with Moscow. As Yergin acknowledged in *Shattered Peace*, his study of superpower relations was informed by the present, by the détente era, and his line of inquiry was concerned with whether “some form of détente...[may have been] possible earlier, much earlier?”²⁵¹ Ultimately, he determined that the phenomenon of détente was produced, in part, by America’s treatment of the U.S.S.R. as a “normal” great power with legitimate security interests, rather than “a world revolutionary state” with which, by definition, “détente is not possible.”²⁵² While more apparent in those texts written during the Cold War, when concern over Soviet-American conflict was higher for obvious reasons, the trend persisted in post-Cold War publications as well, although recommendations tended to shift from specific policies to the role that the United States should play within the international system more generally.

The willingness to make policy recommendations represented a fascinating breach of historical etiquette that revealed how past and present were interconnected in historical practice. In a circular process, diplomatic historians made assumptions about the nature of Soviet motivation in the past which were tied to their perception of the U.S.S.R. in the present (or at least as it existed until its dissolution). Michel de Certeau’s discussion of historical practice is instructive in this regard:

Any reading of the past - however much it is controlled by the analysis of documents - is driven by a reading of current events. Reading of both past and present are effectively organized in relation to problematic issues which a

²⁵¹ Yergin, 13.

²⁵² Yergin, 409.

historical situation is imposing. They are haunted by...models or interpretations that are invariably linked to a contemporary situation.²⁵³

For diplomatic historians writing about the early Cold War, the various models of Soviet motivation that “haunted” them in the present were applied retroactively in order to discern the existence of the same motivational hierarchy in the past. After identifying these historical patterns, scholars offered recommendations for present and future American policy on that basis. The irony was that it was a set of highly politicized presentist assumptions about Soviet motives that produced this particular understanding of early Cold War history in the first place. The present informed the inquiry into the past, and that past then legitimated recommendations for the future. Taken together, past, present, and future existed in a productive tension with each other, in which the truth of one conferred legitimacy upon another such that a particular view of the “true” nature of the Soviet state was produced.

The nature of this process suggests why the various characterizations of Soviet intent that developed during the Cold War persisted in post-Cold War historiography: outward Soviet behavior and internal evidence was considered in light of an abstract hierarchy of state motivation, not vice versa. In other words, this abstraction provided the interpretive road map by which evidence and events were understood. The various notions of Soviet motivation all found support in communist archives precisely because such notions provided the frame of reference within which the new evidence itself was confronted.²⁵⁴ In effect, the manner in which Soviet motivation was characterized *pre-*

²⁵³ Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History*, trans. Tom Conley (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 23

²⁵⁴ LaCapra has argued that the frame of reference plays a constitutive role in determining what the historian considers factual. As he stated, “a fact is a pertinent fact only with respect to a frame of reference involving questions that we pose to the past.” See LaCapra, 31.

figured historical interpretation and shaped the primary source evidence accordingly. It was an “imaginative construct” that produced meaning at the levels of documentary research and of narrative composition. “The web of imaginative construction,” R.G. Collingwood wrote, “is something far more solid and powerful than we have hitherto realized. So far from relying for its validity upon the support of given facts, it actually serves as the touchstone by which we decide whether alleged facts are genuine.”²⁵⁵ In a reflection upon totalitarianism published in 1954, George Kennan pondered how his own imagination had influenced his view of totalitarianism:

When I try to picture totalitarianism to myself as a general phenomenon, what comes into my mind most prominently is neither the Soviet picture nor the Nazi picture as I have known them in the flesh, but rather the fictional and symbolic images created by such people as Orwell or Kafka or Koestler or the early Soviet satirists. The purest expression of the phenomenon, in other words, seems to me to have been rendered not in its physical reality but in its power as a dream, or a nightmare. Not that it lacks the physical reality, or that this reality is lacking in power; but it is precisely in the way it appears to people, in the impact it has on the subconscious, in the state of mind it creates in its victims, that totalitarianism reveals most deeply its meaning and nature. Here, then, we seem to have a phenomenon of which it can be said that it is both a reality and a bad dream, but that its deepest reality lies strangely enough in its manifestation of a dream.²⁵⁶

Kennan’s point is a valid one: there is always a degree of imagination in any reconstruction of the past. In order to organize historical information and understand the past, certain leaps of interpretive faith were made at an abstract level – in this case, the nature of Soviet motivation.

As Kennan’s observation suggests, historical imagination is not so much distortive of reality as it is productive of a particular reality, of furnishing the abstract concepts that enable evidence to be interpreted and events made meaningful. As Frank Ninkovich wrote, it is impossible to “discard the conventions, prejudices, creative

²⁵⁵ R.G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1946), 244.

inspirations, and ideological frameworks that we bring to all of our understandings of the world for the simple reason that these preexisting frameworks are a condition of our knowing.”²⁵⁷ Hence, a closer reading of the abstract concepts of Soviet state identity, as applied by diplomatic historians to the early Cold War period, permits a greater understanding not only of how we write about the past, but how that inquiry is informed by the present and laden with political consequences. Such consideration not only assists in critically engaging the histories of the past in their great diversity, but also in understanding how historical understanding may be made to legitimate a desired policy as necessary or sensible, while simultaneously pre-empting consideration of alternative views.

²⁵⁶ Quoted in Paterson, *Meeting the Communist Threat*, 16-17.

²⁵⁷ Ninkovich, *The Wilsonian Century: U.S. Foreign Policy since 1900* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1999), 7.

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