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# **The Evolving Interpretations of the Origins of the Cold War**

*Have Historians Reached a Consensus on the Origins of the Cold  
War?*

Ritgerð til B.A. prófs

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## Abstract

The Cold War and its origins have been a constant source of debate among historians and quite rightly so. With no access to Soviet archives until 1991 and the outcome of the hostilities unknown, historians were left to draw their own conclusions from official documents and published propaganda. Hence, as with any historical event, interpretations have changed over time. In this paper, I set out to explore whether assessments have shifted to a degree whereby historians today have come together in their understanding of the origins of the Cold War. In order to answer this question, an investigation is required to explore how and why these historical perspectives have changed.

First, the two traditional viewpoints of the Cold War are discussed, namely the orthodox and revisionist interpretations. The orthodox view places responsibility on the USSR for the development of the Cold War whereas the revisionist view argues that the hostilities developed as a result of reacting to one another's actions. Subsequently, the viewpoints of a selected group of post-Cold War historians are explored. Gaddis argues that hostilities between the United States and Soviet Union had their roots in the nations' different perceptions of security. Zubok and Pleshakov maintain that Stalin's character and diplomatic actions were of particular importance in the onset of the Cold War. Mastny also emphasises the role of security and how the USSR's perception of the past shaped their future policies. Their conclusions are compared and contrasted in order to evaluate which views they have in common. When analysing current perspectives, it remains essential to determine what Russian historians are highlighting today. To do so, the Russian outlook is explored through the history curriculum of high school textbooks and teaching material, where textbooks from 2009 (and teaching material from 2007) are contrasted to the recent 2017 edition. Not only are the various viewpoints of several historians evaluated, but equally important is to evaluate the reasons that have led to the changes in their outlook.

It is clear to see that the opening of the archives, combined with the passage of time, political depolarisation and therefore a lessened role of ideology, has led to a change in views on the origins of the Cold War. Historians today have largely reached a consensus on the general picture of the origins of the Cold War. They interpret the beginning of hostilities in a more insightful light, where deeper rooted concerns come to the fore and the role of ideology has diminished significantly from the prominence it enjoyed during the course of the Cold War. The search for security has a new significance for both the United States and particularly the Soviet Union. Then again, historians in any field of expertise will never reach the same conclusion when evaluating any conflict in history and therefore discrepancies are bound to arise but are not a cause for concern.

The origins of the Cold War remain significant today and are relevant to analysing the future of the current relationship between Russia and the United States.

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## Introduction

The Cold War and its origins have long been debated by historians. Spanning more than four decades, the Cold War was 'fought' by the United States and the Soviet Union, although it never culminated in a direct military confrontation. The Cold War was characterised by hostility between these superpowers and encompassed all aspects of political, economic, social, cultural and military life, but fell short of open warfare. Traditionally, ideology, the fight between communism and capitalism, was accredited to be at the forefront of all policy decisions. Similarly, deteriorating relations between the two powers was explained by the fact of each nation reacting to the other's actions. However, after the collapse of the USSR and subsequent end of the Cold War, along with the opening of the Soviet archives and the decrease in political polarisation of historical events, current evaluations of the origins of the Cold War have become more insightful, objective and therefore accurate.

The debate surrounding the origins of the Cold War is of particular relevance today. In a world where media is festered with 'fake news' we need to find methods to discern and analyse documents, motives and policies, and to remember that there is always more than one factor at play. One has to dig critically deeper and find more wholesome information from multiple perspectives than what is officially broadcast, or prove that the published news does not deviate far from reality. Having studied Cold War history earlier, I was specifically intrigued to find out more about what lay behind the actions and motivations of both the Soviet Union and United States. When translating chapters from the Russian history textbooks, I found it particularly interesting to discover how similar Western and Russian views are today, i.e. they are relatively balanced and not written for political purposes.

This paper is organised into four sections. First, the views of orthodox and revisionist historians are discussed. Against the backdrop of these traditional historical viewpoints written during the Cold War, the views of four post-Cold War historians are considered, described and evaluated, namely John Lewis Gaddis, Vladislav Zubok, Constantine Pleshakov and Vojtech Mastny. Subsequently, Russian textbooks and teachers' guides are analysed from 2007 and 2009 and compared with the most recent history syllabus from 2017. The reasons for the change in views are explored, namely factors including the opening of the Soviet archives, the conclusion of the Cold War itself, followed by the trends of historians in the 1990s and the shift to a more balanced, less political understanding of the events that is upheld today. A conclusion is reached as to how and for what reasons these views of the origins of the Cold War have changed and evolved to form a general consensus today among Western and Russian historians.

The authors were chosen based on the fact that they are well known and serve as representatives of the views shared by many in their specific interpretation of the Cold War. Similarly, Gaddis, Zubok, Pleshakov and Mastny all provide broad discussion points, as they do not solely focus on one aspect of the Cold War or another. Some authors, for example, focus only on the impact of the atomic bomb whilst others exclusively

concentrate on the role of Germany. A wide array of topics is covered by the post-Cold War authors discussed in this paper, which should provide a sufficient overview of the multi-faceted and complex world that existed at the time of the beginning of the Cold War.

As with any historical event, interpretations of events and conflicts change over time and this paper sets out to explore how the approaches to studying the causes of the Cold War have developed over the years, what historians today emphasise and agree upon in comparison with earlier orthodox and revisionist historians and the reasons for these convergences taking place.

## Traditional Interpretations

During the Cold War, two principal theories developed and evolved by historians to explain the intricacies of the Cold War. The first is the orthodox view, which sought to place responsibility of the Cold War on the shoulders of the Soviet Union. The second, which developed later, is referred to as the revisionist approach. Revisionists reject the notion that the Soviet Union was solely responsible for the Cold War and that instead, the development of the Cold War was a result of mutual suspicion and the two superpowers reacting off each other. It is important to bear in mind that these interpretations were all devised whilst the Cold War was still ongoing.

### Orthodox View

The Western orthodox view of the Cold War places responsibility for the development of the Cold War on the Soviet Union. This perspective became the adopted view of the American government. Orthodox historians emphasise that the Soviet regime was unquestionably expansionist and would take any measures necessary to increase Soviet influence. According to this view, America simply reacted to Soviet expansionism. It was interpreted to be the combination of Soviet ideology, expansionist tendencies and Stalin's character that ultimately led to the Cold War.<sup>1</sup>

The nature of Soviet expansionism, discussed by Arthur Schlesinger, an American historian, was a result of both imperial Russian expansionist tendencies, namely the desire for better access to the sea, combined with a Leninist ideological quest for world revolution.<sup>2</sup> Revisionists will argue that the USSR/Russia has always been in search of security; to strengthen defences against future invasions. Historically, Russia has been a target for invasion, from the Mongols to the Nazi invasion of 1941. The USSR suffered terrible losses during WWII, which led some to consider Stalin to be reasonable to want to establish a 'buffer zone', due to the lack of natural borders surrounding the nation.<sup>3</sup> However, evidence exists that the USSR was not simply in search of a 'buffer zone' for

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<sup>1</sup> Schlesinger, "Origins of the Cold War," 23.

<sup>2</sup> Schlesinger, "Origins of the Cold War," 24.

<sup>3</sup> Schlesinger, "Origins of the Cold War," 29.

security: they wanted more, as seen through Stalin's 'salami tactics' when taking over Eastern Europe and Soviet involvement in Iran.

It is clear through treaties, such as the Percentages Agreement with Churchill, that Stalin was a strong advocate of the 'spheres-of-influence' strategy to maintain world order. Britain, through Churchill, was open to this method whilst the US was strongly opposed. This approach was the opposite to universalism, as supported by Roosevelt, whereby the balance of power should lie within an international organisation, such as the United Nations. Universalists advocated that "all nations shared a common interest in all the affairs of the world."<sup>4</sup> As the term suggests, 'spheres-of-influence' refers to regions where one power dominates politically, culturally and economically over other nations.

Although this approach evidently ended up taking root, Schlesinger points out several reasons why Americans were against any agreements with regard to spheres of influence, and the dangers of such agreements. The first reason being that dividing the world is inherently unstable and not sustainable, and Americans feared this would lead to a third world war. The Cuban Missile Crisis arguably shows how a division of the world could lead to confrontations that are difficult to contain. The second, that it would hinder the establishment of an international body from managing the balance of power. The third was that a 'spheres-of-influence' world order would inherently lead to isolationist policies which would close off trade, which is essential in a capitalist system. The fourth reason Schlesinger explains is that once given a sphere of influence, when would it be enough for the Soviets?<sup>5</sup> Wouldn't the probability of wanting to increase the sphere be ever more likely if it was agreed to? One would only have to look back a few years at Hitler's policies: he was evidently not about to stop his expansion after the Munich Agreement in regard to Czechoslovakia. The last and probably the most important reason was that it went against everything the Americans had been fighting for during the Second World War: the principle of freeing Poland, just so that it would come under Soviet control, went against the reason for declaring war in the first place. Therefore, it was the combination of ideals and realistic approaches that created American opposition to dividing the world into spheres of influence.

Schlesinger admits that the Cold War was a result of a kind of a chain reaction, as revisionists will argue, whereby each superpower adopted policies that were perceived as a threat by the other, and then both took defensive measures against those policies. He describes it as "suspicion and counter-suspicion, action and counter-action."<sup>6</sup> However, Schlesinger argues that the revisionists neglect key aspects on the Soviets' behalf that leads him to the conclusion that the Soviet regime and its nature was ultimately responsible for the Cold War and its escalation.

The first most evident component is the Soviet Union's ideology. Lenin himself preached that there is to be a class struggle, that only one ideology can win; not both can survive,

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<sup>4</sup> Schlesinger, "Origins of the Cold War," 26.

<sup>5</sup> Schlesinger, "Origins of the Cold War," 36-9.

<sup>6</sup> Schlesinger, "Origins of the Cold War," 45-6.

i.e. capitalism and communism. As such, by definition, the two superpowers are sworn enemies by the ideology that encompasses their beliefs, as the United States was the largest capitalist state at the time. No matter what the American government attempted to do, it would not change the mind of Soviet Russia who would continue to bring communist ideology to the world. It made a meaningful dialogue between the two nations ideologically impossible.

As Schlesinger mentions, ideology, however, is not enough to sustain revolutionary activity over a long time and so the character of Stalin is examined. With the undemocratic and authoritative nature of the Soviet Union, Schlesinger argues that the only possible hindrance to the development of the Cold War was Stalin himself. He was unquestionably the totalitarian dictator of the USSR. If Stalin had possessed the will to avoid such confrontation with the US, he would have done so. Stalin alone had the power to make a difference as he had the, although terrorised, support of the people. Nevertheless, the very nature of Stalin deterred him from taking action to prevent the development of the Cold War. As is evident through the purges and the Great Terror, Stalin was excessively prone to paranoia, suspicion, "obsessions and compulsions." Some would go as far as to say he was prone to madness. The argument here is that nothing was clearly ever going to ease Stalin's paranoia and so how could it be expected that American plans would have such an effect?<sup>7</sup>

In this chapter, the orthodox view, as represented by Schlesinger, has been discussed. Orthodox historians emphasise the need for the US to contain the ever expansionist and aggressive communist Soviet Union, led by Stalin. If Hitler would stop at nothing, surely, leaders of the capitalist world should prevent such an escalation from happening again. In addition to Lenin's ideology of world revolution, the Soviet Union also showed signs of wanting to increase their sphere of influence, after a series of invasions and attacks. According to Schlesinger, the Soviet Union was ultimately responsible for the development of the Cold War due to its aggressive nature.

#### Revisionist View

The revisionist interpretation of understanding the Cold War places emphasis on the mutual suspicion and reaction of both the US and the Soviet Union. Revisionists do not place full responsibility on the USSR for the Cold War's development and, in extreme cases, even argue that the United States alone should be held culpable. In this chapter, LaFeber's examination of the Cold War is discussed. He argues that the origins of the Cold War have their roots much earlier than the setting of World War II. He analyses the policies and objectives of both the American and Soviet governments and concludes that the US intentionally designed various organisations so that the USSR would be excluded, in order to guarantee American control.

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<sup>7</sup> Schlesinger, "Origins of the Cold War," 46-50.

The Cold War is argued to have had much earlier manifestations than the end of WWI by Walter LaFeber, an American historian. The similarities between the US and Russia are drawn up: both had large empires and believed they had a 'calling' for expansion, under the tsar's "instrument of God's will" and the Americans' spreading the influences of capitalism. However, in terms of structure, the US was a federal system whilst the Russian empire was highly centralised. The US believed in an open marketplace whilst the Russia wanted to control trade. The conflict between America and Russia over Manchuria during the 1890s is portrayed as being the first confrontation between the two powers over exactly this issue of internationalism or isolationism. LaFeber explains that, over the years, the US and the West attempted to isolate Russia from international affairs, as seen in the Versailles Settlement.<sup>8</sup>

There is no doubt that America was really the only country that came out of WWII a victor. The majority of Europe was devastated by massive destruction, economic turmoil and outright exhaustion. No fighting had taken place on American soil. The US was indisputably the strongest economic power as well as being the only one in possession of the atomic bomb by the end of the war.

Aware of this strategic position, the Americans used their economic strength to their advantage. LaFeber illustrates how the Americans were willing to support international organisations and funds such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the United Nations and the Marshall Plan as Americans knew they would be the dominating force of such undertakings. As capitalist market economies rely on trade and competition, the US stood to lose if assistance was not provided to Europe to aid in the post-war recovery.<sup>9</sup> As for the United Nations, the design of Article 51 gave the US the control it needed, without Soviet veto interference. Therefore, LaFeber highlights that the US only joined the UN knowing they could control it.<sup>10</sup> Likewise, financial contributions affected voting in the IMF and since the US had the most to contribute, it would also be in a position of power.<sup>11</sup>

Similarly, the Marshall Plan, introduced in 1948, was deliberately designed so that the Soviets would refuse to accept financial aid. The plan required "economic records (...) be open for scrutiny," which the Soviet Union could not accept. Also, had the Soviets been involved, the costs of the program would have greatly increased.<sup>12</sup> It seems highly hypocritical that the US would refuse aid to someone for the reasons of cost when the US was attempting to kick-start the European economy again, no matter the costs. The US had no interest in designing the Marshall Plan in an appealing way for the USSR to accept. LaFeber implies that the US added significantly to the division of the world through economic favouritism. However, the USSR's harsh treatment of smaller Eastern

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<sup>8</sup> LaFeber, *America, Russia and the Cold War*, 1-4.

<sup>9</sup> LaFeber, *America, Russia and the Cold War*, 12.

<sup>10</sup> LaFeber, *America, Russia and the Cold War*, 24.

<sup>11</sup> LaFeber, *America, Russia and the Cold War*, 11.

<sup>12</sup> LaFeber, *America, Russia and the Cold War*, 60.

European countries did not contribute either to improved relations between the two powers.

Contrasting the US's strong position after WWII, the Soviet Union suffered severe losses during the war and its conditions were far worse than in America. Much of the fighting had taken place on Russian soil. Although figures vary, the Soviet Union lost over 20 million people. Therefore, it seemed logical that Stalin and the Soviet Union did not want a repeat of such devastation. Thus, LaFeber argues that Stalin's policies were not determined by ideology, expansion or world revolution; they were determined by the terrible conditions that the USSR was in.<sup>13</sup> The Soviets were not looking to expand their sphere of influence, as orthodox historians would argue, but instead they were looking for a 'buffer zone' for security in order to prevent a future invasion and 'capitalist encirclement'. The US could not relate to such conditions as at this point, Americans faced no threat of invasion.

Consequently, counter to orthodox views, Stalin's suspicions of the West were hence realistic, not paranoid, although some post-revisionists will argue that he was both. The West's involvement in Russia's Civil War and the delayed promise of opening up a second front in WWII are highlighted as examples that caused realistic suspicion among the Soviets. Therefore, Stalin's priorities lay not in starting a world revolution but in securing Russia and his own power.<sup>14</sup>

Similarly, the explosion of the American atomic bomb in Hiroshima and Nagasaki was primarily motivated by two objectives. The military objective was clearly to end the war against Japan more quickly and to save American lives. The underlying political ambition however, despite Soviet promises to invade Japan in August 1945 (eager to get their revenge after being defeated in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904/5), was to showcase the strength of American military might to the Soviet Union. The United States was the only power in possession of the deadliest weapon in the world at that time.<sup>15</sup> The bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki served as the start of the arms race, a significant aspect of the Cold War for years to come. Lastly, the adoption of the Truman Doctrine in 1947 allowed the American government to effectively hide behind an "ideological shield" to justify any intervention in other nations' affairs. LaFeber points out that the Soviets had not even been as aggressive during the months preceding the declaration of containment.<sup>16</sup>

In this chapter, the positions of the US and Soviet Union after World War II and how they affected policy-making were discussed. Americans used their strength to their advantage, referring to the atomic bomb and the endorsement of international organisations. The Soviet Union was looking to prevent another occurrence of the staggering losses of WWII. LaFeber demonstrates how revisionists argue that the Cold

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<sup>13</sup> LaFeber, *America, Russia and the Cold War*, 5, 19.

<sup>14</sup> LaFeber, *America, Russia and the Cold War*, 22.

<sup>15</sup> LaFeber, *America, Russia and the Cold War*, 26-7.

<sup>16</sup> LaFeber, *America, Russia and the Cold War*, 50, 59.

War was a result of the Soviet Union's and the US's reaction to each other's actions. In the most extreme cases, roles are reversed from the orthodox view by attributing foremost responsibility to the United States and implying that its actions were those that led to tensions in international relations.

## Post-Revisionist Interpretations

The assessments of four well-known post-Cold War historians are explored in the following chapters, followed by an evaluation of their views. Gaddis presents a view where ultimately the two nations clashed over different perceptions of security and the ways of upholding it. Zubok and Pleshakov offer a dynamic perspective as they have a Soviet background. They highlight the importance of Stalin's character and diplomatic failures in terms of understanding the escalation of tensions. Mastny also addresses the security question and places importance on Stalin's character in the development of events.

### Gaddis

John Lewis Gaddis, an American historian, presents the Cold War in a different light to both orthodox and revisionist historians and argues that aggression of one or the other side was not the sole reason for the outcome of events. He discusses the similarities between the two superpowers before WWI, the ideological influences of Lenin and Wilson, the US' and USSR' isolationist tendencies in the 1920s and 1930s, although for different reasons, the effect of the Pearl Harbour, the atomic bomb, the implications of the Marshall Plan, and the quest for security. Gaddis argues that the different perceptions of security, not ideology, were bound to clash eventually and hence were an essential aspect of the Cold War.

Emphasis is placed on the similarities between the United States and Russia leading up to the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, even though these nations interacted very little with one another. Both abolished slavery and serfdom around the same time. Both had isolationist and self-interested propensities that dominated policies. Both were expanding empires, but, as Gaddis points out, at this time in history this was not a cause for conflict as the "world was still empty enough."<sup>17</sup> He implies that this expansion, as prophesied by Tocqueville, would eventually lead to confrontation as the world 'fills up'. Improvements in technology, transportation and communication accelerated the speed of deterioration of US-Russian relations. Nationals were exposed to the other culture from travel or media, which planted the seeds for mistrust of the other and made (a negative) interaction more likely.<sup>18</sup>

The messianic influences of Lenin and Wilson should not be overlooked either. Gaddis argues that their personalities and ambitions magnified their countries' differences.

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<sup>17</sup> Gaddis, *We Now Know*, 2.

<sup>18</sup> Gaddis, *We Now Know*, 3-4.

Lenin based his ideology on Marx's teachings of a supposed science of class struggle whereby Lenin's ultimate goal was world revolution and the defeat of capitalism. Wilson was just as ambitious, but in the complete opposite direction, namely in the promotion of free and open markets and the removal of injustice. Gaddis highlights that both nations set out on their ideological pilgrimage around exactly the same time: with Russia's revolution starting in November 1917 and Wilson's Fourteen Points address in January 1918 for the Versailles Settlement. (It is noteworthy however, that both, failed to see their visions fulfilled as not all of the Fourteen Points were incorporated and Lenin did not achieve world revolution). Although Gaddis argues that confrontation was not a predestined ideological clash but rather a coincidence and a result of German diplomacy; events on a mass scale would have taken a completely different turn had Wilson and Lenin not been around. In other words, to a large degree, these two as leaders, (as well as their successors), determined the direction of their respective countries.<sup>19</sup>

Additionally, the 1920s ushered in a time of political isolation for the US and USSR but for different reasons and circumstances. Gaddis explains that, although undoubtedly invested economically in Europe, the US turned politically inward after World War I as no real threat to US security existed. Germany had been defeated, Russia was consumed by civil war and Britain and France were unlikely to become enemies again after the war. The US saw no need to assume world responsibility when no obvious enemy existed. After the Wall Street Crash in 1929 and the subsequent Great Depression, the United States also looked inward to strengthen the country's economy. Similarly, Stalin was not much involved in European affairs as his priorities lay in strengthening the state, as it was considered to be a prerequisite for world revolution.<sup>20</sup>

The attack on Pearl Harbour in 1941 serves as the "defining event" that shocked Americans out of isolation. It was viewed that international involvement was the only way to protect national security and prevent such a pivotal attack from happening again. According to Gaddis, methods such as establishing peacetime military bases around the world and 'reviving the international community' through the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank were used to achieve this objective. At this time, the Soviet Union was not yet an obvious enemy. However, it is undeniable that these attempts by the US were seen as a challenge to the USSR as the Americans were viewed to be imposing their will on others.<sup>21</sup>

The theme of security is recurrent and crucial to understanding the origins of the Cold War. Security was a necessity for both superpowers, but their perception and methods of obtaining it were completely different. This, Gaddis argues, made confrontation unavoidable. In the eyes of President Roosevelt, security was to be reached through both pragmatism and principles. In the West, "security was to be a collective good, not a benefit denied to some in order to provide it to others." In other words, the West and

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<sup>19</sup> Gaddis, *We Now Know*, 5-6.

<sup>20</sup> Gaddis, *We Now Know*, 7-8.

<sup>21</sup> Gaddis, *We Now Know*, 35-6.

US advocated for collective security. On the other hand, Stalin's policy was much more unilateral than the US government's as he had total control over his country. In Stalin's mind, "security came only by intimidating or eliminating potential challengers." This view shares similarities with the old economic theory claiming that there is only a set amount of wealth in the world, where the wealth of one nation automatically decreases when another's increases. For Stalin, national security meant personal security and he was prepared to do almost anything to secure both. Such contrasting views of security were bound to clash at some point.<sup>22</sup>

With reference to past conflicts and changes to the balance of power, Gaddis suggests that perhaps ideology was irrelevant to the Cold War. He explains that as in any historical conflict, "bumping and bruising" takes place when a power vacuum arises after a conflict, whether both contenders were democratic or authoritarian.<sup>23</sup> He compares states to billiard balls to explain that nations are only ensuring their survival through power. States can be bigger or smaller but will still collide in the struggle for power.<sup>24</sup> Thus, he suggests that the US and USSR would have come to a head regardless of their ideology; they were simply two of the only contenders for the balance of power after World War II.

Furthermore, during the Second World War, Gaddis mentions that Roosevelt and Churchill were willing to put aside ideological differences for geopolitics, referring to working with Stalin against Nazi Germany. Stalin even expressed compassion and sympathy for Roosevelt's physical illness of polio. Clearly, some respect was to be had for the President for his skills as a statesman, as Molotov explains: "Roosevelt knew how to conceal his attitude toward us but Truman – he didn't know how to do that at all." However, in spite of this, Gaddis goes on to say that Stalin never trusted Roosevelt. Due to this lack of trust, Gaddis does not consider Roosevelt's death to be a turning point in altering long-term relations, arguing that if Stalin did not trust Roosevelt, what reason would we have in assuming that he would begin to trust Truman, "that noisy shopkeeper" who lacked the ability to conceal his hard-line thoughts.<sup>25</sup>

The effects of nuclear war must also be considered when analysing the development of the Cold War. Contrary to past advances in military technology, the emergence of nuclear weapons promoted "peace and not war." A "new rationality" developed in leaders after the Second World War as they came to realise that "the more devastating (weapons become) they become less usable." Gaddis indicates that nuclear weapons were only used as a provocation and that the intention was never to 'push the button'. He nonetheless warns of the precarious decisions surrounding such weapons and that anything could happen with a similarly capricious leader. The decision of the Americans to use their newly developed atomic bomb on Japan was never up for debate. Gaddis demonstrates that reflection upon the effects of atomic weapons only came after the

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<sup>22</sup> Gaddis, *We Now Know*, 15.

<sup>23</sup> Gaddis, *We Now Know*, 11.

<sup>24</sup> Gaddis, *We Now Know*, 27.

<sup>25</sup> Gaddis, *We Now Know*, 10, 22-3.

war. Truman and his administration were in a state-of-war frame of mind. Hence, the American use of the bomb was not primarily to “impress” or “intimidate” the Soviets, as revisionists would argue, but to defeat the Japanese as quickly as possible.<sup>26</sup>

Similarly, in relation to American incentives for creating the Marshall Plan, the US was willing to sacrifice “immediate economic gains to invest in long-term geopolitical stabilisation.” Gaddis does not deny, however, that like any powerful state, the policies of the United States, referring to the Marshall Plan, were “self-serving” and admits that the American invitation for the USSR to join was “only symbolic.” Nevertheless, in the end, what ended up surprising the Soviets and perhaps the Americans themselves was that the US effectively set the stage for their own future “exploitation” by creating “future economic competitors” as they were supposed to “balance” the Soviet Union.<sup>27</sup> As stated, although having the unanticipated consequence of creating future challengers, at the time of the Marshall Plan’s creation, the US government gave a higher priority to economic and political stability within the West rather than to exploit the West themselves. The American leadership sought to create an advantageous environment for interaction and trade. In contrast, the Soviet Union preferred to be in complete control of their allies and satellite states. Again, these different understandings of economic strength were likely to conflict with each other.

Thus, these methods of international cooperation to ensure future stability through the Marshall Plan rendered Stalin’s calculations completely inadequate. Stalin’s misinterpretations ended up costing him. Stalin was convinced that capitalist powers would inevitably cause future wars and conflicts. Due to the inherent characteristics of capitalism and its “greedy belligerency,” Stalin did not believe that the West and the Soviet Union were likely to cooperate with one another. However, as Gaddis argues, Stalin failed to grasp key reasons why such a conflict was unlikely to develop between capitalist states. One reason is that the very fact that World War II had occurred and that memory made leaders of the Western world want to prevent such an atrocity from developing at all costs. Similar to Gaddis’ analogy of billiard balls colliding, Stalin’s reasoning was based on the assumption that multi-polarity of states existed in world affairs. Lenin had based his theory on the multi-polarity of states, which led to the clashes of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Second World War effectively cleaned the international arena of such states of “roughly equal strength,” producing a bipolarity instead, between the US and USSR. Thus, conflict between states that were far weaker than the US was much less likely to develop. Gaddis compares the circumstances after the Second World War to the “early stages of imperialism” where few capitalist countries clashed over peripheries. In effect, Gaddis suggests that Stalin got “his models wrong.”<sup>28</sup> Stalin failed to grasp Western concerns and did not possess a concrete vision for the future of the Soviet Union, as has been upheld by traditional historians.

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<sup>26</sup> Gaddis, *We Now Know*, 85-8.

<sup>27</sup> Gaddis, *We Now Know*, 194, 196-7.

<sup>28</sup> Gaddis, *We Now Know*, 195-6.

Contrary to traditional views, Americans and Soviets had the same concerns about Germany's future. Gaddis assumes that the Allies did not have their own expansionist objectives but rather, similar fears. Questions of whether Germany should be unified or divided, granted harsh or moderate reparations schemes, were considered by all sides. The harsh terms of the Versailles Treaty were believed to have contributed to the outbreak of the Second World War. No-one wanted to repeat that mistake, but at the same time it was desirable to seek some guarantees such that Germany would not re-emerge as a strong and powerful state. Similarly, if Germany were unified, Allies would run the risk of either Germany itself becoming a threat again or falling under the influence of the other side, i.e. under American or Soviet influence.<sup>29</sup> Germany was a source of tension for both sides as it encapsulated many of the hostilities and disagreements between the US and USSR.

The development of the Korean War was seen as a surprise by all sides. The question of responsibility has long been contested, as well as just simple matters such as the war's initial beginning, given the lack of sources from all sides involved, including the Americans, Soviets, Chinese and Koreans. New evidence shows that Stalin was the first to give the 'green light' for attack to North Korean Kim Il-Sung, after rejecting earlier demands. It is clear that no-one expected the conflict to escalate to the degree it did. There appeared to be no apparent evidence of American intention to intervene. The speech made by Acheson in January 1950 portrayed evident intentions to other nations that Korea was not on the US's list of priorities in Asia. Hence, the decisiveness of the American response caught the Soviets and North Koreans by surprise. The reason for such a swift reaction to the nature of the North Korean invasion is twofold. Firstly, the attack crossed the 38<sup>th</sup> Parallel, an international boundary established after Japan's defeat in 1945. Secondly, the invasion resembled another infamous surprise that remained fresh in Americans' minds: Pearl Harbour. Thus, the US was not prepared to let this conflict go without involvement. There have even been conspiracies that the Americans set the war up and colluded with Rhee, the South Korean leader, but as Gaddis points out, no hard evidence exists for this.<sup>30</sup>

In summary, Gaddis presents a view that emphasises the importance of Lenin and Wilson in setting the ideological stage for the events that followed, how the US and USSR were prone to isolationism in the 1920s and 1930s, albeit for different motivations, the effect of the attack on Pearl Harbour that shook the US out of isolation, the impact of the atomic bomb and the implications of the Marshall Plan. Ultimately, Gaddis upholds that the two nations clashed over different perceptions of security (political and economic) and how to uphold it, rather than ideological differences, although they played a part in shaping policies. The search for security is argued to be the root of US and Soviet concerns over the future of Germany, America's unexpected decision to intervene in the Korean War, the shaping of the Marshall Plan, ensuring future American security through the fortification of European markets, which as a consequence, through its design, conflicted with the Soviet perception of ensuring security by force.

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<sup>29</sup> Gaddis, *We Now Know*, 115-6.

<sup>30</sup> Gaddis, *We Now Know*, 70-7.

## Zubok and Pleshakov

A more Soviet oriented view of the Cold War is put forward by Vladislav Zubok and Constantine Pleshakov, as their book focuses on the factors that shaped the Kremlin's policies. The character of Stalin, his diplomatic faults, as well as the effect of the idea of Russia being a historical 'saviour' on Soviet policies are analysed. Important juxtapositions are considered to explain the complexities and often contradictory nature of the USSR and its leaders. According to Zubok and Pleshakov, Stalin's weaknesses as a diplomat ultimately led to the development of the Cold War and various case studies are depicted to portray this claim, including Germany and the Korean War.

In the preface of their book, Zubok and Pleshakov make a point to illustrate that they grew up in the Soviet Union with very little understanding of international affairs and that "two-thirds of our lives passed under the shadow of the Cold War". They were only 'drilled' about what to do in case another full-blown war would ensue between the two superpowers; but other than that, they had little awareness of their political surroundings. Most of the historic events had already taken place by the time they were adults. Both also have a background that gave them exposure to the West.<sup>31</sup> This undoubtedly distances the authors from the events, making them less susceptible to bias and more likely to base their arguments on evidence.

Similar to Gaddis, Zubok and Pleshakov underline the role of Russia's messianism in shaping policies. The idea of Russia as a saviour, especially of European civilisation throughout history, can be interpreted as a key component in determining its objectives. The religious concept of Russia as the Third Rome and assuming the role of 'protector' of Orthodox Christianity, combined with adopting the revolutionary part of 'messenger' to spread the ideals of communism, as well as protecting Europe from multiple invasions, (including the Mongols, Napoleon and defeating the Nazis), come together to give Russians the assumed position as "protector of mankind", however justified this may be. Zubok and Pleshakov explain that after such sacrifice in World War II, it was not surprising that the Soviets felt the Allies "owed them,"<sup>32</sup> as they had just prevented Nazi domination over Europe.

Some may argue that the USSR willingly gave in to the development of the Cold War, but Zubok and Pleshakov provide three main reasons why the USSR did not desire such an outcome. The first being the tremendous human loss (more than 20 million died) and destruction after the Second World War. These losses lead to Soviet expectation for "special treatment" which could have developed in two ways: through economic assistance or via the establishment of spheres of influence. The Soviet Union was in no way prepared for another war after such sacrifices and therefore no reason existed for Stalin to "pursue brinkmanship." Lastly, the cooperation between the USSR, Britain and the US during the war did not seem to indicate future deterioration of their interactions.

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<sup>31</sup> Zubok and Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War*, ix-xiii.

<sup>32</sup> Zubok and Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War*, 2-3.

All sides made compromises. No-one would have believed relations would worsen so quickly after the war.<sup>33</sup>

On a similar note, Zubok and Pleshakov imply that Roosevelt's death was a turning point in the decline of relations as he had been a good partner for Stalin. The combination of Roosevelt's death, Churchill's electoral defeat and the dropping of the atomic bomb is argued to have led Stalin to return to his insecurities and distrustfulness that, in turn, contributed to degenerating relations between all three nations. It is explained that in the company of Roosevelt and Churchill, Stalin felt as if he were among equals and that he could achieve some of his demands with success. Roosevelt was "important" to him and the "only president whom Stalin accepted as a partner." It is even suggested that Stalin had a certain degree of trust for the President as he was "not shaken" when notified of a separate Nazi peace with the US. However, with Roosevelt's death in April 1945 and Churchill not being re-elected to office that July, the tides turned to increase Stalin's distrust. With two familiar faces gone, they were replaced by a new group of politicians who were not perceived to be as powerful by Stalin as the Big Three, as he was used to only dealing with a few players. Thus, within a few months the "trilateral diplomacy deteriorated before Stalin's eyes." Nevertheless, Zubok and Pleshakov derive that Stalin was still hopeful for cooperation, despite Truman, "a rookie president," being tested by Stalin at Potsdam. In their analysis, it was not until the atomic explosions in August 1945 that effectively pushed Stalin over the edge towards his "old demons of insecurity." The bomb came as a surprise, given that Stalin and Molotov believed the warnings about the Manhattan Project they had received were "disinformation."<sup>34</sup> Roosevelt and Churchill were able to keep Stalin's paranoia at bay. Hence, with both of them gone, the common enemy defeated and the effect of the explosion of the most destructive weapon, there remained little hope for Stalin for future cooperation with Britain and the United States, and relations soon turned sour.

Turning to the character of Stalin, his nature enabled a variety of interpretations to emerge. It is explained that through records, Stalin is described as secluded, reserved and an introvert who rarely shared his feelings, whether on paper or spoken. Stalin's reticence has led to so many interpretations, since his mind evidently could not be read.<sup>35</sup> Comprehensions of him are bound to differ and will be styled according to the point being made. But then again, it is also arguable, that the phrase 'actions speak louder than words' is also applicable, although Stalin's actions may have been distorted by official records or Western perceptions.

A discrepancy between theory and reality is a frequent theme in Soviet ideology and is important when analysing Russian objectives during the Cold War. Two main juxtapositions arise, as noted by Zubok and Pleshakov, and they relate to individuals and the role of the state. According to Marxist ideology, individuals and personalities should

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<sup>33</sup> Zubok and Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War*, 6-7.

<sup>34</sup> Zubok and Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War*, 39-41.

<sup>35</sup> Zubok and Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War*, 11.

be insignificant to the class struggle. In reality, as notably discussed above about Stalin and by other scholars, it is the opposite in the USSR where the role of the leader is of paramount importance to policy-making.<sup>36</sup> Similarly, reality deviates from the theoretical with the 'socialism in one country' policy. In Leninist ideology, the state is supposed to wither away eventually. However, in Stalin's eyes, a strong state was a prerequisite for world revolution and turning Russia into a world power. This view is described as a "revolutionary-imperial paradigm" by Zubok and Pleshakov and serves as the origin of the 'socialism in country'. Although Stalin's methods seem to contradict the very ideals of communism, Zubok and Pleshakov argue that Stalinism was just a "branch" off Marxism, and that Bolshevism, Leninism and Stalinism all share the same root.<sup>37</sup>

It is explained that Stalin had two contradictory objectives when it came to the future of Germany. On the one hand, he had long-term plans of establishing an alliance with Germany as he was aware of Germany's potential strength as a nation. This connotes that Stalin did not wish for the permanent separation of Germany. However, contrary to this long-term aim were his short-term goals of extracting resources from Germany as part of the Soviet Union's rearmament. This would not have made a future friendship all that likely. Hence, mixed messages were being sent from the Soviet administration. Here, the Berlin blockade of 1948 serves as a good example. Originally, Stalin strove to force the Western powers out of agreements of forming a united West Germany, which corresponds to his long-term aim of preventing German separation. However, the blockade had unintended consequences, referring to the successful airlift, which, in reality, made the divisions even more clear and brought Western Europe even closer to the US. Stalin did not foresee this and, as a result, the blockade became a diplomatic failure. The division of Germany would later symbolise the division of the Europe and the world. Zubok and Pleshakov argue that Stalin's failures in diplomacy partly explain the onset of the Cold War and say that he "could have performed better."<sup>38</sup> In this light, Stalin saw the Marshall Plan as a plan to indirectly "revive German military-industrial potential" to be directed against the Soviet Union.<sup>39</sup>

A similar case of unforeseen consequences is portrayed by the start of the Korean War. Zubok and Pleshakov explain that Stalin's support of the North Korean invasion of the South in 1950 was carefully considered. It is explained that Stalin had "reservations" about the attack when Kim Il Sung "begged for his blessing," as shown in a "classified Soviet account," but eventually agreed.<sup>40</sup> This implies that the Korean invasion was not Stalin's original idea but by agreeing to aid Kim, he acted in an opportunistic manner in the hopes of expanding Soviet revolutionary influence in Asia. Zubok and Pleshakov explain Stalin's reasons for agreeing to Kim's demands by analysing the answers to the simple questions of 'why now?' and 'why North Korea?' To summarise, Stalin agreed to

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<sup>36</sup> Zubok and Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War*, 5.

<sup>37</sup> Zubok and Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War*, 12-13, 17.

<sup>38</sup> Zubok and Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War*, 47-52.

<sup>39</sup> Zubok and Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War*, 50.

<sup>40</sup> Zubok and Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War*, 54-5.

the invasion as, at that time, he did not presume that the US would intervene based on various sources. Intervention had previously been a fear. Also, North Korea was of strategic importance, with its proximity to Japan and Soviet desires of ensuring Soviet dominance in that area of Asia. If an invasion was not supported, in the context of Sino-Soviet relations, the USSR would be seen as back-tracking and not as revolutionary in the minds of the Chinese communists, to whom the Soviets were now allied. It was necessary for Stalin to uphold Soviet leadership as a communist world power.<sup>41</sup> Stalin's reasoning appears to be logical in retaining and expanding Soviet influence in Asia. However, it is demonstrated that he ultimately miscalculated: the US did intervene, Soviet involvement was misinterpreted, and the outcome of the war was less than satisfactory. Although Zubok and Pleshakov admit that the Korean War was not a result of Soviet aggression, Stalin is nonetheless portrayed as taking advantage of the situation to expand Soviet authority. In turn, the Korean War cast a shadow over Soviet relations with the West and the US in particular, as Stalin was seen as aggressive and expansionist in Asia, yet without concrete evidence of his motives for backing such an attack.

Zubok and Pleshakov go into some detail about the influence of the cooperative nature of Soviet officials Litvinov and Maisky on Stalin's policy towards the West. Litvinov and Maisky advocated cooperation over confrontation with the West. Their reasons for cooperation lay in securing a peace for at least ten years in order to rebuild the state's strength, winning back territory in Europe, being allies with the British and Americans for economic assistance (where Soviet losses have been estimated to be 700 to 800 billion rubles by the Maisky commission) and guaranteeing a Soviet Union veto power in an international organisation to prevent actions against Soviet will. In many ways, Stalin heeded their advice to begin with, for example, in gaining veto power in the United Nations and in raising his demand of \$5 billion to \$10 billion in reparations at Yalta along with the general feeling and expectation of peace at the wartime conferences.<sup>42</sup> However, as previously discussed, Zubok and Pleshakov explain that the drastic shift in policy after World War II from cooperation (following Maisky's and Litvinov's guidance) to conflict lay in Stalin's "obsessions and compulsions."<sup>43</sup> His paranoid nature partly led to the deterioration of Soviet-American relations.

Traditional views of orthodox and revisionist historians are criticised for being too simplistic in analysing the origins of the Cold War. As mentioned above, Stalin was a hugely complicated individual and did not just 'switch' from cooperation to confrontation after the Second World War. His diplomatic weaknesses did not contribute to improved relations. The development of the Cold War was more complicated than a result of reactions, as argued by revisionists, or expansionism, as advocated by orthodox historians. A large part of the Soviet Union's outlook was based on history, being characterised by empires and ensuring security.

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<sup>41</sup> Zubok and Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War*, 62-3.

<sup>42</sup> Zubok and Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War*, 28-34.

<sup>43</sup> Zubok and Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War*, 38.

In this chapter Zubok and Pleshakov's views of the origins of the Cold War were discussed. They present a view that depicts Stalin as crucial in the shaping of events. Their work focuses primarily on the Soviet side of events, rather than American objectives, as they were able to access sources from the Soviet archives when they were opened. Emphasis is placed on Stalin's character, as he was the one who prevented the USSR from taking the path of cooperation, as advocated by Maisky and Litvinov and others who preferred a route of non-confrontation with the West. Stalin was paranoid of security threats, whether national or personal, and his distrust was 'unleashed' with the death of Roosevelt and Churchill's failure to gain re-election. He viewed them as equals but once that balance was gone, Stalin's apprehensions increased. His paranoid nature is revealed through his failed diplomatic ventures in Berlin and Korea. At the outset, his motives for the blockade and the aid to Kim Il Sung were opportunistic and based on logical reasoning, but in both cases, Stalin miscalculated the American response.

## Mastny

Vojtech Mastny, an American of Czech descent, is another historian who writes after the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991. He principally argues that Stalin and the Soviet Union's quest for security led to the onset and development of the Cold War. Mastny argues against a simplistic chain reaction between the two superpowers and instead looks to more deeply rooted Soviet security concerns. The search for security had its origins in the post-war euphoria and the example of Iran is provided. The Marshall Plan threatened the USSR's security interests and hence led to a tightening of control in Eastern Europe as well as the creation of COMECON. Similarly, Germany was a source of tension and the Berlin blockade effectively became a question of credibility.

Firstly, a few contradictions at the end of World War II were apparent. Whilst the USSR was possibly in the optimal position for future security after the defeat of Nazism, Mastny argues that even this was not enough for Stalin. He refers to Stalin's character and his "insatiable craving" for security as the main propagator of tensions with the West. The delayed evacuation of Soviet troops from Iran is explained as an example of the exuberant joy after the victory, where Stalin did not feel the need to evacuate the troops immediately, which was interpreted as expansionist.<sup>44</sup>

Mastny similarly maintains that security weighed more on Soviet policy than simply reacting to the US. It is argued that the unforeseen obstacles of obtaining security in Eastern Europe led to Stalin's tightening of control over the satellite states, rather than a response to US actions. Stalin rejected East German pleas to stop the Soviet "dismantling" of German industries as part of its reparations and refused to make Germany's government a federal system as it would make Germany more autonomous. It is clear that the Soviet perception of security revolved around having weakened neighbours, whilst the US saw security in the strengthening of markets.

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<sup>44</sup> Mastny, *The Cold War and Soviet Insecurity*, 23.

Correspondingly, Mastny agrees with Gaddis on the different perceptions of security. In addition, Mastny's view resembles Zubok and Pleshakov's assessment of Stalin's contradictory policies towards Germany, which lead to the development of tensions between East and West. In other words, priming Germany to be a future ally whilst also implementing oppressive policies on the German people did not equate to friendly relations.<sup>45</sup> Mastny implies that with the shift to harsher handling of Eastern European states, with the example of Germany, Stalin effectively closed the door on democracy to preserve the Soviet Union's position in Europe. Once again, this was the opposite to American tactics used to ensure their economic influence in Western Europe.

The Truman Doctrine, according to Mastny, was not as critical as made out to be. The Marshall Plan, instead, was perceived by the Soviet leadership to be a much greater threat to Soviet security. In regard to the proclamation of the Truman Doctrine, where Americans would do everything in their power to contain the spread of communism, the Soviets were not as alarmed by it as everyone thought. This was due to the fact that Stalin interpreted that the doctrine did not apply to territories already under his control. On the other hand, the Marshall Plan threatened Soviet security directly as it entailed long-term European integration and unification. Mastny points out that the Americans were cunning in placing the decision of the future of Europe, whether divided or united, in Soviet hands.<sup>46</sup> It is important to bear this in mind in comprehending how and with what measures the Soviet leadership believed it was necessary to ensure security.

In response to the Marshall Plan, The Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON) was created by the USSR. Mastny points out the key differences that should be kept in mind between the set-up of the Marshall Plan compared to that of COMECON. The foundation of COMECON differed from the American Marshall Plan in its implementation by force rather than by "invitation." Additionally, COMECON allowed the Soviet Union "to extract *from*" the partners, whereas the United States "supplied *to*" its European counterparts. Although COMECON is described as an "empty shell",<sup>47</sup> it attests that the Soviet Union actively tried to affirm its hold on its satellite states for security purposes. The Soviet leadership never effectively believed in voluntary alliances, yet instead, sought to coerce the satellite states into obedience and thus were more prepared to use military force than their American counterparts. With such an understanding, expansion was always a part of the Soviet defence policy.

On the subject of Germany, the Berlin blockade is argued to have essentially been about credibility. Contrary to the original blockade plans laid out by the foreign ministry, Mastny claims that Stalin deliberately chose not to block air access to Berlin for two reasons. The first was effectively cost saving as Stalin sought to avoid a military clash involving the use of the USSR's own fighters. The second, and perhaps more important reason, was that Stalin considered American success unlikely (since this meant supplying

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<sup>45</sup> Mastny, *The Cold War and Soviet Insecurity*, 24-5.

<sup>46</sup> Mastny, *The Cold War and Soviet Insecurity*, 27.

<sup>47</sup> Mastny, *The Cold War and Soviet Insecurity*, 57-8.

goods to two million people) and so predicted the US to come out of this venture humiliated and hence forced to accept Moscow's demands.<sup>48</sup> Stalin counted on a Soviet triumph and an increase in credibility. But things turned out differently and the humiliation shifted to the Soviet Union instead.

Mastny introduces the key characteristics of Soviet insecurity and how they embodied themselves in economic and military plans. Unlike the Truman Doctrine, the Marshall Plan was a direct threat to Soviet security where COMECON served as a substitute and a guarantor of Soviet economic security, but was implemented through force. Finally, the Berlin blockade was meant to save Soviet resources, avoid a direct confrontation and bolster Stalin's image, none of which were achieved. The quest for security remains a key component of understanding Soviet motives and policy when it comes to comprehending deteriorating relations in the wake of the Second World War.

## Evaluation

Gaddis, Zubok, Pleshakov and Mastny all show a greater understanding of Soviet security concerns in their attempts to rethink Cold War history than traditional historians. They all agree that the Cold War was not simply a result of ideological conflicts. Such conflicts existed and certainly had some effect, but they were not the main cause of the deterioration of relations. If anything, ideology had the biggest role to play for propaganda purposes to ensure US/Soviet influence in their respective spheres. Ideology was used to justify each nation's respective actions. There appears to be a general consensus among post-revisionist authors relating to the security concerns of both superpowers and of the importance of Stalin, his character, policies and miscalculations on the shape of events that ensued. However, some differences, or more accurately different emphases, arise in regard to more specific matters, for example, when discussing the Marshall Plan, Germany and the Korean War.

On matters of security, Gaddis and Mastny express similar views. Gaddis highlights the difference in perception of security of the US and Soviet Union and how this inevitably led to conflict. The US was a strong believer in collective security, where security was shared by all through the enforcement of pragmatism and principles. On the other hand, the USSR favoured security by force and did not believe it could be shared. For Stalin, national security meant personal security and was achieved through threats and the removal/weakening of opponents. Likewise, Mastny argues that security was the main influence on the nature of Soviet policies. Obtaining security took precedence over reacting to the US. Stalin's obsessive quest for security led to the deterioration of relations in the post-war world. The obstacles of obtaining security in Eastern Europe led to a tightening of control, not aggressive tendencies. Security is a ubiquitous phenomenon, prevalent in all the case studies discussed.

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<sup>48</sup> Mastny, *The Cold War and Soviet Insecurity*, 48-9.

All the post-Cold War authors share the belief that Stalin's role as an individual was crucial in the development of the Cold War. History would have taken a completely different turn without him. Gaddis, Zubok and Pleshakov all emphasise the Russian, and Stalin's in particular, messianic view of the world. Zubok and Pleshakov underline that Stalin thrived on using the messianic and chivalrous roles that Russia has played in the past, including fighting the Mongols, defending the country against Napoleon and in defeating the Nazis, to justify demands of a 'special treatment' for all of the sacrifices made to save Western civilisation. With a deeper understanding of Soviet attitudes and of what was going on in the Kremlin, they argue that it was Stalin's obsessive nature and insecurity that eventually caused him to stop listening to the advice of Litvinov and Maisky, who advocated cooperation with the West. This led to a deterioration of relations. Mastny further argues that Stalin's "insatiable craving" for security prevented him from seeing the relatively secure position of the Soviet Union directly after the war. Gaddis also points out the impact made by Lenin and Wilson respectively on the development of the 20th century as they set the ideological framework on which future policies would be based. Gaddis concludes that the role played by leaders is just as important, if not more, than the policies and ideologies of nations.

Similarly, Gaddis, Zubok and Pleshakov portray the importance of Roosevelt in the eyes of Stalin. Zubok and Pleshakov discuss how Roosevelt's death, combined with Churchill's electoral defeat, also led to increased tensions, since Truman lacked the tolerance and, to some extent, understanding of Stalin that Roosevelt possessed; Stalin's apprehensions therefore grew significantly with him gone. However, Gaddis disagrees and claims that Stalin never trusted Roosevelt but was willing to put aside ideological conflicts for geopolitics. Gaddis concludes that Roosevelt's death had no lasting impact for relations, whilst Zubok and Pleshakov imply there was a degree of trust that existed between the two leaders and once gone, led to an increase in distrust.

With regard to more specific cases and actions, the Korean War, the situation in Germany, the Berlin blockade as well as the implications of the Marshall Plan all provide better insight into the policies pursued by both American and Soviet leadership.

The Korean War was not a result of aggressive Soviet policies but did inflict unforeseen consequences, as agreed on by Gaddis, Zubok, and Pleshakov. Gaddis discusses how the Korean War and its escalation came as a surprise by all sides as no-one had anticipated American involvement. Zubok and Pleshakov focus more on the conflict's causes and Stalin's relatively logical reasons for giving Kim Il Sung the go-ahead. These included the preservation of communist credibility in Asia in the eyes of the Chinese, the opportunistic approach to spread Soviet influence due to Korea's strategic location, as well as the conviction that the US would not intervene. As noted previously, Stalin miscalculated his steps and this underestimation ended up costing the Soviet Union. The USSR was perceived as aggressive and this overshadowed its relationship with the West.

Germany became a source of tension primarily as a result of the contradictory objectives of the Soviet Union (as well as other nations) as to how Germany's future was to be

perceived. This is mentioned by all the post-revisionist scholars. On the one hand, Stalin sought to prevent Germany from ever obtaining its pre-WWI and WWII strength from a security perspective as this would inevitably threaten the Soviet Union. On the other hand, the Soviet Union wanted to ensure that Germany would become a future ally and not succumb to western influences. As noted by Zubok and Pleshakov, employing oppressive measures in Germany to ensure Soviet control would not appear convincing to the German population to become allies with the USSR. The Berlin blockade similarly, along with the Korean war, was also a matter of credibility, as argued by Mastny. Zubok and Pleshakov argue that Stalin did not foresee that the Americans could pull off a successful airlift and so miscalculated his moves; which according to Mastny, was a severe blow to the Soviet Union's credibility and to Stalin's in particular. The intention was to prevent further talks on a united West Germany, which were being discussed by the other three occupants of West Germany, but the final result was ironically the further division of Germany and Europe as the blockade brought the US, Britain and France closer together.

On the subject of the Marshall Plan, Gaddis and Mastny discuss the implications of its implementation for both the US and USSR. Gaddis underlines that evidently the US designed the Marshall Plan for its own benefit, as any strong state would, but effectively also made itself subject to losing the economic powerhouse status that the US had acquired. The Marshall financial aid was to help the recovery of Europe after the war and was intended to counter the USSR's influences. However, the US was willing to set aside short-term gains for long-term stability within the international arena. The Marshall Plan, advocated by Mastny, threatened the security of the Soviet Union directly. Contrary to the belief during the Cold War that the Truman Doctrine was hugely significant in shaping further events, it was in fact the Marshall Plan that provoked a greater reaction from the USSR, as Stalin did not see the Truman Doctrine as applying to spheres he already controlled. The Marshall Plan, however, endangered Soviet security as it would entail a consolidation of western countries through economic integration that would essentially alienate the USSR economically. Furthermore, in extreme cases, as mentioned by Zubok and Pleshakov, the Marshall Plan was seen as an indirect plan to revive Germany military might to counter the Soviet Union, and so measures were taken (the creation of COMECON) in an attempt to counter this sense of alienation and insecurity.

All the post-revisionist historians come to a similar conclusion that the Cold War was a product of security concerns, Stalin's character and mishaps in diplomacy. Each scholar emphasises key areas over others that confirm this outlook. Mastny stresses first and foremost that Soviet policies were dominated by the search for security. Gaddis also maintains that the issue of security was of principal concern, whereby the two superpowers had different perceptions and methods of obtaining and maintaining security, yet that these conflicting views were bound to clash at some point. Ideology played a smaller role than traditionally maintained. Zubok and Pleshakov devote their analysis to the failures of Stalin as a diplomat and his belief that the Soviet Union was validated in its security demands after playing the role of a 'saviour' throughout history.

## Russian school textbooks

When evaluating the changing views of the origins of the Cold War, in order to broaden our horizons of understanding, an important aspect to explore is how historians in Russia have interpreted the events leading to the development of the Cold War. History textbooks for high school students in Russia offer a way to discover more about the official stance towards the origins of the Cold War. The following chapters have been translated from Russian high school textbooks and teachers' guides and the main points are discussed and contrasted. Nationalist trends emerged in the textbooks from 2007 and 2009 but failed to take root. The most recent textbook from 2017 does not place responsibility on one country or another, making way for a more balanced and objective view of the Cold War. As the textbooks feature a large part of Russian history, it cannot be expected of the authors to go into great detail and analysis of events. Only the main events and general outcome of them are discussed. However, even these short chapters are sufficient, as they provide a valuable glimpse into the Russian historical narrative for students.

### Current textbook overview

For this section, two chapters from a Russian school textbook for Grade 10 from 2017 were analysed. The chapters cover the USSR's standing after the Second World War, the collisions of geopolitical interests, the characteristics of the Cold War, the division of Europe as well as the arms race. The account is generally balanced between both sides but it is noticeable that Stalin is not often mentioned by name, but cited through the 'leaders' or the 'leadership'. One side is not given full responsibility for the development of the hostilities, instead the descriptions are fairly objective and matter-of-fact.

At the end of the Second World War, the textbook verifies that the USSR had established its position in global affairs as a world power. Although having sacrificed many lives, the Soviet Union controlled a large part of Europe, northern China, Korea and Iran, as part of a temporary occupation after the war. Similarly, some territorial gains were made, including an agreement signed with China over joint operation of a railway from Chita to Vladivostok as well as gaining access to Port Arthur as a naval base. The Soviet Union found itself in a strengthened and expanded position in the Far East, after the victory in World War II and the defeat of Japan. It is also mentioned that the USSR was one of the initiators in the creation of the United Nations and held a place in the Security Council with veto power along with the US, Britain, France and China.<sup>49</sup>

The textbook illustrates that the likelihood of collision of geopolitical interests of the USSR and US was apparent even before the end of the war. In Europe, the Soviet Union had aims of consolidating its security by creating a buffer zone of friendly states. In Asia, the USSR wanted an equal participation in the occupation of Japan. In the south, the Soviet Union's objective was to gain a foothold in Iran and access to the passage

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<sup>49</sup> Gorinov et al., *Istoriia Rossii: 10 klass*, 74.

through Black Sea straits. It is portrayed that the leaders of the Soviet Union regarded their victory and growth as a historical pattern. The interests of the United States differed significantly. The main goals of western capitalist states was to confirm their leading positions in the world and to prevent the spread of communist influence. The United States assumed the leadership role in this regard as Britain and France were severely weakened by the devastation of war. By the end of the war, the US was the most significant economic power as well as being in sole possession of the atomic bomb. The US prevented the Soviet Union from occupying Japan in 1945. According to the authors, in order to strengthen their hold on Europe, the Truman Doctrine and Marshall Plan were launched by the US. The Truman Doctrine signified that the United States was actively prepared to counteract Soviet influence. The implementation of the Marshall Plan in 1948, which consisted of large-scale financial assistance to Western Europe, had obvious political implications as Europe's fast economic recovery would protect those states from Soviet influences. The USSR refused aid for political reasons. In response to the Marshall Plan, Cominform was established, which consisted of communist parties in many Eastern European countries. In September 1947, a thesis about the division of the world into two camps was proclaimed at the Cominform conference.<sup>50</sup> The text clearly does not place unilateral blame on either side for the development of tensions.

The chapters discuss the main characteristics of the Cold War, which included the arms race, ideological confrontations and local conflicts. The text argues that Churchill's "Iron Curtain speech" made an impact on Stalin and the world and that Stalin later proclaimed that it was Churchill who had called for a new war. Both sides developed plans for a military confrontation, yet neither was prepared to engage the other. The authors claim that both superpowers acted in a reasonable way as they did not cross the line beyond which would start a new world war. Conflicts during the Cold War never led to large-scale collisions between the two nations. It was necessary to reach a peaceful coexistence so as to avoid a third world war developing, which would destroy mankind with the use of atomic weapons.<sup>51</sup>

The authors additionally discuss how the biggest manifestation of the Cold War found itself in Europe; Germany in particular. It is stated that initially the Soviets did not force communist transformations in Eastern Europe, similar to Mastny's argument. However, the intensification of the Cold War led the Soviet Union to getting a tighter grip around the governments in Eastern Europe to assume more control. Germany was divided into two. The Berlin blockade developed in the wake of the deteriorating economic situation in East Germany, after the western part received separate monetary reform in 1948. A ban on the transportation of goods into west Berlin was introduced. The West responded with an airlift. The Berlin blockade was a typical manifestation of the Cold War where the conflict did not escalate into a full-blown military confrontation. However, the events augmented the division of Europe. The formation of NATO in 1949 led to further divisions. The creation of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG; west)

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<sup>50</sup> Gorinov et al, *Istoriia Rossii: 10 klass*, 75-6.

<sup>51</sup> Gorinov et al, *Istoriia Rossii: 10 klass*, 76-7.

and the German Democratic Republic (GDR; east) made the two factions into outposts of capitalism and communism.<sup>52</sup>

Arms production in the USSR continued at a high pace after World War II, according to the textbook. The testing of the first atomic bomb in the Soviet Union was in August 1949 in Semipalatinsk. The Korean War and international tensions had a direct impact on the internal politics of both countries. The growing threat of NATO led to a decision taken by the Soviet leadership to sharply increase the strength and number of USSR armaments within three years and the creation of military-industrial bases in socialist European countries. According to official data, the number of Soviet troops doubled between 1949 and 1953 from 2.9 million to 5.8 million. The air force, navy and land units were all extended. The atomic project was the most expensive and time-consuming endeavour. The result of many years of hard work was the testing of the hydrogen bomb in 1953. New military bases were built in close proximity to US borders. Hostility between the US and USSR, combined with the continued war in Korea and lack of nuclear parity, contributed to the growth of the arms race.<sup>53</sup>

The textbook from 2017 clearly offers a relatively balanced perspective on the origins of the Cold War. It is not one-sided in terms of favouring the United States or Soviet Union in their actions. They are not presented in a particularly negative light either. Therefore, an objective stance is taken, which does not pronounce one nation more or less responsible for the deterioration in relations and decreasing chances for prospects of future peace. Both the US and USSR contributed to escalating tensions and both appeared logical in their thinking in terms of formulating policies, plans, agreements and increases in arms production. There is never an outright mention of the Soviet Union as expansionist, rather how a buffer zone was required for security purposes. The US acted from a position to counter the spread of communist influence and to secure American influence in Western Europe. Conflicts arose from differences in geopolitical interests and motives for involvement in the international community.

#### Earlier history textbooks and teachers' guide overview

In contrast to the most recent and fairly objective history curriculum of the Cold War described above, an earlier government-sponsored educational program, created in 2007 but conceived a few years earlier, sought to incorporate re-Stalinisation and nationalism in the teaching of high school students. This return to nationalism focused on the positive aspects and achievements of the Stalinist era, discussed by Khapaeva. Consequently, the historical narrative of the Cold War slants towards a negative view of American actions and seeks to justify the USSR as simply responding with necessary measures to counter American hostility. A chapter from a 2009 Russian high school textbook along with teaching materials from 2007 written by Danilov and Filipov were used in this section.

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<sup>52</sup> Gorinov et al., *Istoriia Rossii: 10 klass*, 103-4.

<sup>53</sup> Gorinov et al., *Istoriia Rossii: 10 klass*, 106-7.

Dina Khapaeva describes a meeting Putin held with history teachers and principals in 2007 to discuss the importance of a state-sponsored positive historical narrative and claimed that the nation was “in need” of one. Putin is said to have realised that history can be a “potent tool of ideological propaganda” and deemed it crucial that no “competing versions” versions of history existed, which he considered to be often “paid by foreign grants.” In the meeting, it was agreed that “historical textbooks should foster optimistic attitudes to the present and past history of their country.”<sup>54</sup>

The curriculum upholds that ideological differences between the capitalist United States and communist Soviet Union prevented a post-war peace developing. Despite the United Nations laying the foundations for future cooperation when it was created in 1945 in San Francisco, the textbook argues that America and the Soviet Union’s ideologies led to another war, referred to as ‘cold’ as it never turned ‘hot’ through direct military confrontation.<sup>55</sup>

The chapter goes fairly systematically and objectively through the initial events of the Cold War, including the establishment of the United Nations and the state of Eastern Europe after World War II, similar to the coverage of these events by the latest edition from 2017. However, when various aspects are discussed in greater detail, such as the Marshall Plan and arms production, especially as seen in the teachers’ guidebook, a clearer position is revealed. In accordance with the program of re-Stalinisation of this time, the curriculum places responsibility on the shoulders of Americans instead of both or attributing the Cold War as being more complex than a debate around blame.

According to the text, when analysing the circumstances of the Marshall Plan, archives show that the creators of the Marshall Plan, in fact, feared the participation of the Soviet Union and hence prevented Soviet access to aid. Guy Burgess, who had been recruited to work with the Soviet intelligence services, provided information that eastern Germany, occupied by the USSR, would not receive US financial aid. The Soviet side then suggested changing the procedure for providing aid where each country would state which goods it required, on the basis of a bilateral agreement. The proposition was rejected but shows that the USSR was in favour of cooperation to find a solution to provide aid to all.<sup>56</sup> Thus, the authors suggest that the USSR did all it could to prevent hostilities and that Stalin was subsequently justified in taking measures to prevent further isolation and US influence spreading. The teachers’ supporting material goes even further. It states that “historians today agree that in the event of the USSR’s accession to the Marshall Plan, Congress would have made the aid purely decorative” and that in reality “the Iron Curtain separated those who received aid through the Marshall Plan and those who did not.” The direct implication that the authors make is that the US was the main contributor to the division of Europe as the Marshall Plan was

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<sup>54</sup> Khapaeva, “Putin’s politics of re-Stalinization,” 66.

<sup>55</sup> Utkin et al., “Kholodnaia Voina,” 14-15.

<sup>56</sup> Utkin et al., “Kholodnaia Voina,” 16.

clearly intended for the strengthening of US political influence, not solely economic. It is explained that the Soviet reaction was then misinterpreted by Americans and seen as offensive, rather than defensive.<sup>57</sup>

In relation to the arms race, American overestimation of Soviet strength for the purposes of justifying their military expenditure is the main focus of both the textbook and auxiliary material. The development of the Soviet “plan for the active defence of the USSR’s territories” in 1947 was purely defensive and the official discourse is that “nothing is known about the existence of offensive plans”. Similarly, various quantitative data about the condition of Soviet versus American and British militaries reveals that the USSR was in a much weaker state than its wartime allies. It is argued that the USSR did not possess the capacity to plan strategic military operations overseas as it simply did not have the forces necessary for this.<sup>58</sup> However, in contrast to this military weakness, the American government deliberately overstated Soviet military capabilities for propaganda purposes, implying American awareness of the disparity in military strength, so as to justify potentially offensive US actions. The US government deemed it essential to enhance the nation’s military power and in order to ensure this strengthening, it was necessary to convince the population of the growing threat of communism. An example of General Sullivan is provided, where he states to the presidential committee that the Soviets were in possession of five times more submarines than the Germans. At the same time, the text implies that the US leadership fabricated these facts.<sup>59</sup> Therefore, a negative view of American actions during the initial stages of the Cold War serves to heighten the image of the Soviet Union in the eyes of Russian high school students as the Americans were culprits of falsely informing their nation for political purposes.

The textbook and teachers’ guide continuously bolster the image of the Soviet Union where it appears to be attempting cooperation and then being justified in taking harsh measures when those proposals were rejected, namely the suggestion about supplying aid to all European countries. Alongside this, the chapters simultaneously depict the United States as self-serving and manipulative.

## Evaluation

When comparing the official text in both textbooks from 2007 and 2017, the reader does not immediately notice the differences between the two publications. On the surface, the version from 2009 attempts to convey a neutral and objective standpoint on the Cold War and the events that took place, however, upon closer inspection, the accompanying teachers’ guidebook suggests something different. In the supporting material, emphasis is placed on the combination of American intentions, failures and deceit, as well as the misinterpretation and overestimation by the US of the Soviet

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<sup>57</sup> Filipov, ““Kholodnaia Voina”: pervye skhvatki,” 56-7.

<sup>58</sup> Utkin et al., “Kholodnaia Voina,” 17-18.

<sup>59</sup> Filipov, ““Kholodnaia Voina”: pervye skhvatki,” 58.

Union's capabilities. It is implied that the USSR acted out of necessity, not aggression. The earlier texts have much more in common with traditional interpretations, sharing many similarities with extreme revisionists who place blame on the United States for the Cold War's development.

The earlier version argues that the US, and the Marshall Plan specifically, directly contributed to the division of the world into two camps and that the Soviet Union did its best to prevent such a development. The teaching material often mentions extreme examples of US leaders employing the advantageous economic position of the US for their own implicit benefit; i.e. the case of General Sullivan consciously overstating the USSR military capability to the presidential commission in order to justify an increase in US military expenditure. Conversely, it is conveyed that the Soviet Union only possessed defensive military plans and made a suggestion all European nations receive Marshall aid, but this was rejected. Ideology, the curriculum states, was at the heart of the development of the Cold War, a traditional viewpoint. The objective of teaching such a nationalist syllabus was first and foremost to increase patriotic pride for the achievements of the Soviet regime, as mentioned by Khapaeva. Thomas Sherlock, however, who compares these two government-sponsored historical narratives, explains that the former, more Stalinist oriented syllabus, failed to emerge as the dominant historical narrative due to various criticisms as it was not in keeping with the current international community. In other words, the nationalist stance was hurting Russia's reputation abroad due to its anti-Westernism. The textbooks of 2009 and teaching material from 2007 were strongly nationalistic as they sought to unite the population through distrust of the West. Sherlock concludes that the texts blamed the West for the atrocities of Stalinism, and in effect, forced the USSR to take the measures it took to secure its influence. In contrast, the more recent texts approved in 2015 contain "none of the anti-Western language" seen in the older versions. Although classifying the United States as self-serving and exploitative of the USSR, Sherlock explains that objectivity is central to the new textbooks. The texts, he points out, do not see the United States to blame, instead the Cold War was a result of geopolitical as well as ideological clashes.<sup>60</sup>

The latest history curriculum provides a much more neutral standpoint of events, taking an objective stance when evaluating the events contributing to the onset of the Cold War. The text goes methodically through the events, from the conditions of the US and USSR after the war to the development of the arms race. The authors suggest that the US and USSR had vital geopolitical interests that were bound to clash, where neither superpower is presented in a more negative or positive light than the other. It is clear that taking a political stance in education is no longer in the interest of the Russian government. Politically charged writing is a part of the past and no longer determines current events. Young students are the future generation of the country, who most, today, have little or no knowledge of what life was like before the end of the Cold War. Thus, the authorities and those who devise the history curriculum have little reason to

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<sup>60</sup> Sherlock, "Russian politics and the Soviet past," 48-52.

flood students with overcharged political sentiments when it is not applicable in today's world. It is more important for students to gain a comprehensive understanding of past events, without solely focusing on the misdeeds of the American leadership or unrealistically bolstering the Soviet Union's actions.

Similarly, it is highly contradictory to be teaching students to be well-rounded, inquisitive and knowledgeable without actually revealing to them all the facts and motivations, not just the information that makes Russia and Soviet Union look 'good'. Both nations succeeded and failed in achieving their aims, just like any country, and one must be aware of this to become a well-informed and enlightened historical thinker.

Therefore, combined with the views of the post-Cold War historians it is clear that both Western and Russian authors today are coming together in their understanding of the Cold War that emphasises a balanced and insightful view and their conclusions are of a similar calibre. Of course, it cannot be expected to gain a full understanding of Russian views through school textbooks alone. They are simplified versions of history to make understanding easier for students. However, their importance should not be overlooked for these reasons as they provide a useful observation of what the authorities wish the historical narrative to be, which today is a balanced perspective on the origins of the Cold War.

## Reasons for Change in Views

A few post-revisionist historians have examined the environment of the post-Cold War years and the effects of the opening of the Soviet archives in relation to changing views and approaches to studying the origins of the Cold War. Fitzpatrick outlines the extent of restrictions before and after 1991. Von Hagen discusses the tendency in the early 1990s to focus on less academic questions when analysing new sources, due to the political situation of the time. Gaddis and Lundestad highlight that perspectives have changed with the end of the Cold War itself, as historians are able to analyse the conflict as a whole. They add that access to new sources from previously classified archives have altered our understanding somewhat. Osterman similarly notes that broader types of sources, i.e. not all from Western archives, have widened our perspective of the events of the Cold War. Pleshakov and Antonio Varsori argue that ideology played a role in the development of conflicts but essentially was not as crucial as traditionally believed to be.

Osterman observes that Cold War analysis before the collapse of the USSR was largely conducted "by Western scholars reliant on Western archival sources." The result, therefore, required historians to infer and interpret Soviet motivations and so forth from official Soviet rhetoric and diplomatic exchanges without hard evidence.<sup>61</sup> Upon revising the debates surrounding the Cold War, Antonio Varsori, an Italian historian, argues that if the Cold War was purely ideological, then the start of the Cold War would have been

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<sup>61</sup> Pechatnov, "The Big Three after World War II."

set at the beginning of the Russian Revolution in 1917, the height of ideology in Russia when Western forces assisted the White Army against the Bolsheviks.<sup>62</sup> This leads to the conclusion that there had to be other factors involved since the Cold War is accepted to have begun in the 1940s. Similarly, ideology, according to Pleshakov, has been a “cushion” for Soviet leaders to fall back on and was used as a “smoke screen” to justify military invasions such as the invasion of Afghanistan in 1979.<sup>63</sup>

Sheila Fitzpatrick, an Australian historian, offers further insight into the effects of restricted archival access before and after 1991. Despite being a social historian and therefore not discussing political and international aspects, Fitzpatrick critically evaluates the changes that have taken place. Archival access for foreign scholars was not completely restricted before 1991, contrary to popular belief. However, there were a few obstacles that faced historians wishing to get access to Soviet archives. The first hurdle was getting into a national exchange where students and scholars could visit the Soviet Union. This process was rigorous and competitive. Once accepted, the second and more important hindrance was that scholars were not permitted to access “*opisi*” (the inventories). As a result, it was difficult to know what sources were available and researchers had to rely on their knowledge of which documents existed to be able to request them. Additionally, scholars and their respective requests could be rejected by the institution at any point during this process. Thus, in an attempt to increase the chance of success, research subjects were often chosen that were considered to be less controversial or “risky”, i.e. not political. Topics to explore were then limited to “social, economic, and cultural history.” Fitzpatrick further explains that political requests were possible in theory but rarely successful in practise.<sup>64</sup>

After the archives were opened, a large part of the 1990s was spent on uncovering the truth about what Fitzpatrick calls “victim narratives.” These refer to the information that had been kept “top secret” under the Soviet leadership, relating to the purges, repressions, the Gulag and so forth. There was evidently a demand to know what the Soviet Union had not published once it no longer existed and could no longer enforce archival restrictions.<sup>65</sup> This directly corresponds with the question of why access to archives was restricted during the Soviet era. It is understandable that whilst the Cold War was on-going, the Soviet Union was resistant to give foreigners, especially Westerners, access to their records for risk of threat or retaliation. From the USSR’s perspective, the scholars, if given access, could use information as fuel for ideological or real attacks. Fitzpatrick reveals that “military and mobilisation plans” as well as “material on purges” were part of the “top secret” information that was classified. Therefore, interest in discovering what had been restricted understandably grew.

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<sup>62</sup> Varsori, “Reflections on the Origins of the Cold War,” 282.

<sup>63</sup> Pleshakov, “Studying Soviet Strategies and Decisionmaking in the Cold War Years,” 238.

<sup>64</sup> Fitzpatrick, “Impact of the Opening of Soviet Archives,” 378-82.

<sup>65</sup> Fitzpatrick, “Impact of the Opening of Soviet Archives,” 396.

The trends that characterised the period when restrictions to Soviet archives were lifted are also illustrated by Mark von Hagen, an American professor. First, political motivations during Yeltsin's era (which is when the article is written) meddled with historians' access to and analysis of archival sources. "Foreign pressures" distorted evaluation as some materials were not released, which could have been potentially harmful for foreign actors as they might "reveal Soviet funding of political parties." In addition, archivists have been "reluctant to release documents which may jeopardise international connections and foreign financial support."<sup>66</sup> Evidently, political agendas and objectives affected archivists' ability to release and historians' ability to discern documents objectively. This trend has diminished now that archives are much less politicised, but it is important to be aware of these political limitations during the 1990s.

The second trend, outlined by von Hagen, and perhaps a consequence of the first (avoiding findings that are too political) was the frenzy surrounding finding answers to trivial questions. There was demand and interest in personal stories and 'non-academic' information in the newly released archives. These included questions such as whether "Lenin's grandfather (was) a Jewish convert to Orthodoxy" or which joke Mandelstam "told that resulted in his death in a labour camp" and so on. As a result, the right questions for historical context and understanding were not being asked. Similarly, with the opening of the archives, von Hagen argues that "we continue to unquestionably accept" findings "as the truth." He compares attitudes to the discovery of the New World: "we return from the archives thinking we have discovered America and in fact are often repeating (...) with more detail the findings of earlier scholars" who often inferred accurately from official documents surrounding Soviet intentions. Critical thinking was not being employed to analyse documents where high expectations existed for finding ground-breaking information. The result is a "decline in the scholarly agenda" by not asking critical questions and not exercising critical thinking when analysing sources. Hence, in order to improve our understanding of events, von Hagen suggests, we must remain critical and "make a collective effort to keep disciplinary standards high" when evaluating new sources.<sup>67</sup>

However, not everything was accessible at once and "important gaps remained." Fitzpatrick explains that a large number of sources remain under the control of the Federal Security Service (FSB).<sup>68</sup> Similarly, Natalia Yegorova explains that whilst the Foreign Ministry is "still the main source of new documents" for the Cold War, other archives exist, which could potentially provide a better picture of the Soviet "decision-making mechanism as a whole but continue to have restricted access. Throughout her article, Yegorova explains that access is only partial but is improving. For example, the Presidential Archive is "especially valuable" but has limited access, the State Planning Committee (Gosplan) contains "important collections" but is "declassified only partly" and the Defence Ministry and Foreign Intelligence Service archives remain difficult to

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<sup>66</sup> von Hagen, "The Archival Gold Rush," 96-7.

<sup>67</sup> von Hagen, "The Archival Gold Rush," 98-100.

<sup>68</sup> Fitzpatrick, "Impact of the Opening of Soviet Archives," 387.

access. Additionally, whilst the COMECON archives could enlighten historians on the “internal processes within the Eastern bloc,” access to them continues to be restricted: “researchers can study just a few files on certain specific issues, selected by archivists.”<sup>69</sup>

Fitzpatrick also explains that the (partial) opening of the archives was abrupt, unexpected and overwhelming. It made historians question the value of their earlier work.<sup>70</sup> Similarly, Swedish academics Martin Kragh and Stefan Hedlund highlight the importance of the opening of the archives, combined with the end of censorship, as it provided an “opportunity to reassess and reinterpret” as well as challenge understandings of the history of Russia and the 20<sup>th</sup> century. “Archival revolution” is a term used to describe the “qualitative leap” in access to Soviet archives. Kragh and Hedlund, however, warn that the term is not absolute, since access before 1991 was not completely classified, as highlighted by Fitzpatrick, and the “degree of archival openness” varies between countries and periods after 1991.<sup>71</sup>

Nonetheless, one must not consider access to sources as the only way to evaluate historical events. Similar to von Hagen’s advocacy of critical thinking, Fitzpatrick argues that “abundance of data does not in itself answer questions.”<sup>72</sup> Kragh and Hedlund state that disputes over historical evaluations still exist. New sources do not account for all historical revelations. The topics chosen, research questions and other “conceptual issues” are just as valuable as primary sources when forming a valuable historical analysis. As a result, a wide variety of evaluations “will continuously coexist.”<sup>73</sup>

Similarly, Mastny advocates the ‘less is more’ approach to analysing the archives as possessing more sources does not necessarily provide mind-blowing revelations. The drawbacks of the opening of the archives find themselves in the too high expectations of historians to find paradigm-shifting evidence, similar to von Hagen’s view. Mastny points out that the “greatest surprise so far (...) is that there was no surprise,”<sup>74</sup> which indicates that the formerly classified documents do not expose any hidden plans or policies. Strategies did not exist behind the scenes that differed dramatically from information published in official documents at the time of the Cold War. The value of the newly available documents depends on how the sources are interpreted and by whom.

Furthermore, Gaddis emphasises that the Cold War must be put into perspective in regard to other wars when analysing its origins. The Cold War was unlike any other conflict in history; it did not span four years as the First World War did, it spanned four (or more) decades (depending on the start chosen). The length of the ‘war’ itself places

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<sup>69</sup> Yegorova, “Russian Archives: Prospects for Cold War Studies,” 546.

<sup>70</sup> Fitzpatrick, “Impact of the Opening of Soviet Archives,” 377.

<sup>71</sup> Kragh and Hedlund, “Researching Soviet Archives” 373.

<sup>72</sup> Fitzpatrick, “Impact of the Opening of Soviet Archives,” 398.

<sup>73</sup> Kragh and Hedlund, “Researching Soviet Archives,” 375.

<sup>74</sup> Mastny, *The Cold War and Soviet Insecurity*, 9.

limits on the historian's ability to be objective when writing whilst the Cold War was ongoing. It was difficult for historians to write about the war without knowing the outcome. Gaddis provides an analogy to explain that few would value a scholar's account of the causes of World War II written in 1942. Perhaps the same can be said for the Cold War. As a result, sources became biased and incomplete as there was little to no access to the other side's archives.<sup>75</sup> Ideologists would strive to "convince themselves" and "seek to convince others"<sup>76</sup> that theirs was the best, most justified and most victorious ideology. The interpretations published during the Cold War were artifacts of the Cold War themselves.<sup>77</sup>

Geir Lundestad, a Norwegian historian, similarly emphasises the limitations encountered by historians writing during the Cold War itself, without knowing its conclusion, as the interpretations were products of the Cold War themselves. He goes further and explains, for example, that revisionism reflected "doubts" around the US failure in the Vietnam war and whether this also mirrored the Cold War itself. He also adds that post-revisionism, which arose in the early 1970s, mirrored the policies of détente as it sought to distribute "blame (...) a little more evenly." Lundestad states that perspectives "inevitably changed with the end of the Cold War itself" as it becomes "much easier to explain war and conflict when they are over."<sup>78</sup>

Mastny argues that with the passage of time, the Cold War appears to be heading into oblivion and has started "to fade from memory" and he sets out to answer why this is. The Soviet Union's disintegration has made it easier to delve into its leaders' motives and intentions. The "partial" opening of the archives and the willingness of "Soviet witnesses" has added another dimension to the study of the Cold War, yet Mastny cautions that these testimonies of witnesses are often inaccurate but are nevertheless valuable. Mastny even claims that the question of blame is an "old inquiry," implying the topic has become archaic which corresponds to his work, as a large part of his book focuses on the unexpected demise of the USSR and Cold War. The distinctions between orthodox and revisionist views have "become blurred."<sup>79</sup> Lundestad, like Mastny, believes the argument of responsibility to be out-dated. "Conflict arises because neither is willing to yield" where one side challenges the status quo and the other attempts to preserve it. Lundestad suggests instead of focusing on blame and "political agendas," we should analyse "*what* happened and *why* this happened."<sup>80</sup>

Zubok and Pleshakov advocate that Cold War history "must be re-examined" with the opening of the Soviet archives. Soviet policies and objectives have become a lot "clearer now" as not surprisingly, one cannot understand the Soviet perspective or know its

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<sup>75</sup> Gaddis, *We Now Know*, 281-2.

<sup>76</sup> Gaddis, *We Now Know*, 5.

<sup>77</sup> Gaddis, "On Starting All Over Again," 27-8.

<sup>78</sup> Lundestad, "How (Not) to Study the Origins of the Cold War," 66-7.

<sup>79</sup> Mastny, *The Cold War and Soviet Insecurity*, 3-4, 7-8.

<sup>80</sup> Lundestad, "How (Not) to Study the Origins of the Cold War," 70.

leaders' perspective without any evidence. One must also consider that difficulties in translation of Russian sources are also encountered. It is not enough to understand the language as it is difficult to convey the cultural meaning of Soviet documents to a Western audience in a relatable way.<sup>81</sup>

The debate surrounding the origins of the Cold War will never be complete. Similar to Kragh and Hedlund, Gaddis admits that yes, we now know more than we used to, with help from the opening of the archives and conclusion of the Cold War, although "we will never have the full story."<sup>82</sup> Pleshakov agrees by stating we definitely have "a clearer vision" today but he remains sceptical over whether we will ever be able to 'fully explain events.'<sup>83</sup> Gaddis advocates looking at events and new evidence from different perspectives, such as "in terms of ecology, or autonomy, or rationality, or morality."<sup>84</sup> 'New' Cold War history will be based on an international and multi-archival perspective.<sup>85</sup>

All of the authors discussed in this chapter agree that the opening of the archives and the end of the Cold War gave way to significant changes in interpretations surrounding the origins of the Cold War and the Soviet Union in general. Political tensions have subsided which makes the exploration of archives less threatening to the Russian government. While archives today may be more accessible, it is important to bear in mind the evolution of access: archives were not all opened at once and historians were still encountering difficulties in the 2000s, as highlighted by Yegorova, whose article was written in 2006. The previous concerns of the Soviet Union and Russia in the early 1990s about archival access are no longer of much importance today; after a lot of instability during the 1990s, Russia has now formed into a solid federation. New sources today do not threaten the existence of the state. Obstacles to archives along with "political tensions" are gone. Soviet history, according to Fitzpatrick, "has become (...) depoliticized with the waning of the Cold War."<sup>86</sup> New sources are not ground-breaking, yet historians agree that the analysis of the Cold War will never be over.

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<sup>81</sup> Zubok and Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War*, xii.

<sup>82</sup> Gaddis, "On Starting All Over Again," 27-8.

<sup>83</sup> Pleshakov, "Studying Soviet Strategies and Decisionmaking in the Cold War Years," 240.

<sup>84</sup> Gaddis, "On Starting All Over Again," 38.

<sup>85</sup> Gaddis, *We Now Know*, 283.

<sup>86</sup> Fitzpatrick, "Impact of the Opening of Soviet Archives," 399-400.

## Conclusion

Prior to the end of the Cold War it was unimaginable to believe that Western and Russian historians could possibly share similar views in regard to the origins of the Cold War. It is a sign of progress that today this is widely the case, as discussed through the course of this paper. A convergence of views appears to be developing, shown among the post-Cold War historians, and also demonstrated in the most recent Russian history textbook from 2017 which sets forth a more objective and balanced perspective surrounding the eve of the Cold War.

Traditional Cold War historians emphasise the roles played by the conflicting ideologies of capitalism and communism as well as mutual suspicion, where both superpowers responded to each other's actions that led to hostilities. Upon reflection, ideology was an effective tool that was utilised to justify certain foreign policy measures, potentially perceived as aggressive, given the lack of accessible sources from the other side. The rationale of reacting to one another's actions overlooks the conditions and deeper concerns that shaped both the United States' and Soviet Union's objectives. The question of blame itself has become archaic. The driving factors behind US and Soviet policy were more complex than believed to be and there were many things at stake on the international stage, including security, reputation, and influence.

As discussed by the various post-Cold War historians, the Cold War was not simply a product of ideology and reaction. Emphasis is now placed on the role of individual leaders, including Lenin, Wilson, Truman and particularly Stalin. Several academics have explored Stalin's nature of paranoia, insecurity and apprehensions that are considered to have contributed to his diplomatic failures. Geopolitical interests led to power struggles, whose roots lay in the fundamental differences between the Soviet Union's and the United States' perception of security, namely how to secure and maintain it. The spheres of influence approach in governing world affairs was never recognised by the American government, whilst Stalin could not accept the idea of the balance of power being in the hands of an international body. These security concerns and geopolitical interests came to a head, as illustrated in the individual cases; namely, the future of Germany, the reasons for and implications of the Berlin blockade, the start of the Korean War and the design and consequences of the Marshall Plan.

During the 1990s, politicians, historians and the public were engulfed by the collapse of the USSR and its implications, whereas today the shock has subsided. Initially, many viewed the dissolution of the USSR as a sign that capitalism had 'won' the Cold War; in effect, that the US had been justified in its actions. However, the collapse of the Soviet Union does not free the United States from evaluation in regard to the origins of the Cold War. Today, most academics accept that inherent flaws exist within any form of government and that ideology is not always the domineering factor in policy-making, although it always has a role to play.

Once the Soviet archives were opened, specific trends emerged in archival research, from uncovering the truth about “victim narratives” to finding personal stories, in order to comply with archival restrictions and political agendas. Conversely, it is clear that today, politics and governments have no vested interest in the type of historical narrative being presented. The tumultuous 1990s have taken on a steady form in the Russian state today, with Putin recently elected to his fourth term as President. Although differences continue to exist between Russia and the United States on the international stage, there appears to be no conflict surrounding the interpretation of history, further illustrating how ideology is no longer as important in the international dialogue as previously.

It is evident that views have evolved towards a more balanced approach to understanding the Cold War. Political agendas no longer influence views as much as they used to during the Cold War era, most recently demonstrated in the shift from a nationalistic stance of the 2007/9 history textbooks to a more neutral view presented in the 2017 version. Russian nationalism in historical writings is overestimated by Western scholars as the reality clearly shows that the Russian narrative (from 2017) is, in fact, much like that of Western historians’ today. With the opening of the archives, new evidence has emerged, but much to people’s surprise, these findings did not result in the paradigm shifts scholars expected to encounter in their understanding of policies, particularly with relation to the Soviet Union.

In many ways, historians today seem to be reaching a general consensus on the origins of the Cold War. The arguments of orthodox and revisionist historians are largely rejected, as they were often written without concrete evidence to support their preordained beliefs. Furthermore, interpretations are moving away from the question of blame and instead, accept that events in history are never solely triggered by one source, as most historians will appreciate. With the help of a broader base of archives, historians are delving deeper into the circumstances that determined the respective nations’ actions. Individual leaders, perspectives of security and specific case studies have been examined to better analyse the broader picture in regard to the onset of the Cold War. However, it is wrong to say that a full consensus has been reached, as historians, be it those discussed in this paper or elsewhere, will always present a variety of views and interpretations. We should not expect academics to agree on all aspects of the origins of the Cold War and this is precisely what makes the study of history fascinating. Perspectives will always be unique to the scholar, varying according to his or her background, interests and/or motivation for research.

Security remains a critical concern for both Russia and the United States, be it economic, geographical or political. Whilst the Cold War may be over, it does not mean that conflicts cannot arise between the two nations. Some may even argue that the clashes today are of a different and perhaps more serious nature than previously, as demonstrated through the economic sanctions placed on Russia after the annexation of Crimea. Thus, the debate surrounding the origins of the Cold War is of particular relevance in current events. It begs the question: if ideology did not have a vital stake in

the development of the Cold War, as agreed on by the post-Cold War historians, does that mean a 'new Cold War' could brew given that Russia has no official political state ideology? US and Russian security concerns, individual leaders and geopolitical and economic interests will most likely continue to collide in the years to come. However, the Cold War, as we know it today, will not be repeated, at least not in the foreseeable future, due to the fact that the bipolarity of the US and Russian power no longer exists. Other contenders have emerged, most notably China. North Korea also poses new threats that are challenging the balance of power and ongoing conflicts in the Middle East cannot be overlooked. The multi-polarity of states has returned to the international stage. Whilst Lenin based his teachings on multi-polarity, this time around it is not only capitalist nations, whether ideological or not, whose impacts are to be felt. Only time will tell what the outcomes may be.

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