The Origins of the Cold War

Lloyd C. Gardner
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey

Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.
The City University of New York

Hans J. Morgenthau
The City University of New York

Ginn and Company
A Xerox Company

Waltham, Massachusetts | Toronto

4/21/71

E
813
.G28
c.4

The American Forum Series

CONSULTING EDITORS

J. Joseph Huthmacher
University of Delaware

Warren I. Susman
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey

Copyright © 1970 by Ginn and Company.
All rights reserved. No part of the material covered by this copyright may be produced in any form or by any means of reproduction.
Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 70-105684
Printed in the United States of America.

Editors' Introduction

For more than a generation the Cold War has been a central influence in the lives of Americans; it is not surprising, therefore, that interest in tracing the origins of that pervasive phenomenon runs high among the nation's historians and students. But, as in the case of most efforts to probe the causes of profound historical developments, explanations of the origins of the Cold War have become more subtle and complex, rather than simpler, with the passage of time.

At the outset, during the Truman years, most Americans and most American historians accepted the "official" interpretation of the Cold War developed by the administration in power to explain and justify its foreign policies. According to this version,

America's wartime vision of a peaceful and progressive postwar world, built upon principles of collective security sustained by the United Nations and continuing Big Power collaboration, was shattered by the resurfacing of Russian ambitions to foment revolution and conquest on behalf of communism's cause. The United States' political, economic, and military responses to this threat represented her assumption of leadership among the "peace-loving" peoples of the world in defense of self-determination and other "democratic" values.

A few political figures at the time rejected the "Liberal Establishment" interpretation of the Cold War—Henry Wallace is one example—but Wallace's poor showing as an independent candidate for the Presidency in 1948 indicated how little popular support his position commanded. A larger number among the nation's intellectuals also refused to assign the "blame" for the Cold War exclusively to Communist Russia; see, for example, Walter Lippmann's *The Cold War* (New York: Harper and Brothers), published in 1947. But for the most part, the country's historians praised Truman as a "realist" in foreign affairs, and a poll of social scientists conducted by Professor Arthur Schlesinger, Sr. as late as 1962 ranked the Missourian high among the "near great" occupants of the White House. Textbooks of the period commonly conveyed the anti-Communist interpretation of the Cold War to thousands of students, as did books so widely used in the nation's classrooms as Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.'s *The Vital Center* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1949), George F. Kennan's *American Diplomacy, 1900–1950* (New York: New American Library, 1951), and Eric F. Goldman's *The Crucial Decade* (New York: Knopf, 1956).

During the 1950's the Cold War assumed new forms and expanded into additional areas of the world. Despite the Eisenhower administration's early attacks on Truman's "containment" policies (see John Foster Dulles, "A Policy of Boldness," *Life, XXXII* [May 19, 1952], pp. 146ff), the Republican regime continued to apply Truman's basic policies in practice. The administration, and the majority of the American people, continued to adhere to the official explanation of the Cold War's origins and nature that had

evolved during the Truman years (see John W. Spanier, *American Foreign Policy since World War II* [New York: Praeger, 1960]).

Nevertheless, during the 1950's various forms of "revisionism" also made headway among historians of the Cold War. A growing number of them adopted the view, suggested even earlier by Hans J. Morgenthau and a few others, that postwar Moscow-directed challenges to American interests in Europe represented manifestations of specifically *Russian*, rather than *Communist*, ambitions. The Cold War had originated as a relatively narrowly limited affair, therefore. The United States should not make the mistake of escalating it to global proportions, for America could not realistically undertake to play "policeman to the world."

Much more radically revisionist was the position that held the United States, rather than either Russia or communism, responsible for beginning the Cold War. Under the leadership of Professor William Appleman Williams, the so-called "Wisconsin School" of diplomatic historians portrayed American foreign policy as essentially a function of the nation's capitalist socioeconomic system. Since at least the late nineteenth century, according to this interpretation, American policy consistently aimed at creating an international polity that would be most conducive to American business expansion and commercial penetration. To those among the emerging "New Left" who pushed the Williams thesis to its most extreme implications, the Cold War thus represented only the latest and most ambitious outburst of American economic imperialism—an imperialism reinforced now with the power of nuclear weaponry. See William Appleman Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy* (Cleveland: World Publishing Company, 1959), D. F. Fleming, *The Cold War and Its Origins* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1961), David Horowitz, *The Free World Colossus* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1965), Gar Alperovitz, *Atomic Diplomacy: Hiroshima and Potsdam* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1965), the several essays on foreign affairs in Barton J. Bernstein (ed.), *Towards a New Past* (New York: Pantheon, 1968), and Gabriel Kolko, *The Politics of War: The World and United States Foreign Policy, 1943–1945* (New York: Random House, 1968).

As criticism of America's role in Vietnam and elsewhere mounted during the 1960's, the New Left's simplistic *anti*-American view of the origins of the Cold War gained popularity particularly among the younger generation of Americans, even as many of their elders held tenaciously to the simplistic *pro*-American interpretation they had imbibed during their formative years. Among scholars of the Cold War, however, there developed a noticeable tendency away from simplistic views, and toward a subtle blending of the hypotheses that had gone before. Writers like Louis Halle (*The Cold War as History* [London: Chatto & Windus, 1967]) and Walter LaFeber (*America, Russia, and the Cold War* [New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1967]) seemed able to take a more dispassionate view, approaching the post-World War II developments that gave rise to the Cold War with much the same detachment they might bring to a study of diplomatic settlements in post-Napoleonic Europe. In such treatments the assignment of "blame" for the Cold War is of minor concern; instead, the study of the Cold War's origins becomes simply part of the long chronicle of misplaced fears, inevitable frustrations, and mutual foibles that make up the history of international relations and, indeed, of mankind. Even though this degree of "objectivity" has recently been attained, however, one cannot be certain that the argument over the Cold War's origins has been exhausted or definitively settled, even on the scholarly level. For one thing, all of the records bearing on the subject have not yet been examined. At this writing former President Truman still has in his personal possession documents from his administration which some authorities believe may shed new light on important aspects of post-World War II American–Russian relations; other documents in American depositories are shrouded in secrecy; and no American scholar has yet been granted access to Moscow's archives. Moreover, who can tell what effects another shift in the external world situation—which has governed attitudes toward the Cold War so importantly in the past—may produce upon the writing of Cold War history in the future?

In any event, the essays and rejoinders by three distinguished authorities presented in this volume, written from varying points of view, are representative of the most recent scholarly analysis of the origins of the Cold War, and to a considerable extent they also reflect the main trends in the historiography of the Cold War just summarized. Each of the essays is rooted in one of the "schools" of interpretation referred to earlier, yet they are characterized by the refinement and sophistication which those interpretations have acquired with the passage of time. Each of the rejoinders was written especially for The American Forum Series, and reflects the writer's response to the essays by his fellow participants. Significant differences still exist, for example, between Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., often considered a spokesman for the Liberal Establishment, and Lloyd C. Gardner, a member of the "Wisconsin School," yet their differences are not argued in the simplistic terms that most likely would have obtained in an earlier time. Some may conclude that the general movement seems to be away from extreme polarization of attitudes and toward some middle point, represented in this collection perhaps to some extent by the position taken by Hans Morgenthau. If so, are historians merely mirroring the trend in the external world situation, in years when a notable thaw seems to have taken place in American–Russian relations?

Notwithstanding that the ardor of the argument over the origins of the Cold War may have subsided somewhat, more than enough questions stimulative to reflection and debate should occur to the reader as he digests these essays. Some of them are endemic to any inquiry of the kind undertaken here. For example, when we seek out the "origin" of an epochal historical development, are we searching for a paramount specific event, or are we dealing with an intricate web of interrelated phenomena over an extended period of time? Of the various kinds of causative factors definable —political, military, ideological, economic, cultural, and the rest— which is *the* most important; or is such a question in itself irrelevant and misleading? Is it a legitimate part of the scholar's task to assign or apportion "blame" in the course of analyzing events that have had direful results for society?

The reader may wish to test the authors who are included in this volume in terms of the degree to which, consciously, or

unconsciously, they touch upon such matters in the writings. In addition, another order of questions will arise from the substantive content of the essays as each of them explores the specific historical problem of the origins of the Cold War. To what extent is Professor Gardner justified in his assignment of a continuity to American foreign policy throughout the twentieth century; or Professor Morgenthau in his assignment of a continuity to Russian foreign policy under both the Czars and the Communists? How does Professor Schlesinger's emphasis on Stalin's personality affect his assessment of the role that ideology has played in the Cold War? All three of the authors allude to the trait of "universalism" as an important factor in the traditional world outlook of Americans. But how does each author define this trait? Does he consider it a positive or negative factor? If the latter, what does he explicitly or implicitly propose as a desirable alternative to "universalism"?

The comparative approach to the study of the origins of the Cold War which this book presents, then, should provide an exercise both in the more general problems associated with the study of causation in history, and in the substantive study of an important aspect of the recent American past. But more than that, the comparative approach should prove relevant and useful for the consideration of present and future action in the field of public policy. For while the Cold War may now be history—and dead—as some have proclaimed, America's role as a major world power is not likely to diminish substantially for some time to come. Study of the Cold War's origins, and of America's relationship thereto, may be instructive in terms of international dilemmas that still lie ahead. It may even help us to avoid some of the kinds of mistakes that have been made in the past.

J. JOSEPH HUTHMACHER
WARREN I. SUSMAN

A Chronology of Early Cold War Events 1945–1949

February 4–11, 1945	Yalta Conference.
April 12, 1945	Death of President Franklin D. Roosevelt.
April 23, 1945	White House Meeting of Truman and Molotov.
April 25, 1945	UN Conference opens in San Francisco.
May 8, 1945	V-E Day.
May 25, 1945	Harry Hopkins arrives in Moscow.
July 5, 1945	Polish Government recognized by Western powers.
July 16, 1945	Successful Atomic Test at Alamogordo, New Mexico.
July 17, 1945	Potsdam Conference opens.