I'll confess that I've been a little afraid to suggest what I'm going to suggest—I'm more afraid not to: that we begin our crusade joined together in a moment of silent prayer. God bless America.

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THE END OF THE COLD WAR

The Cold War Was a Great Victory for the United States (1992)

John Lewis Gaddis (b. 1941)

INTRODUCTION *More than four decades since its start following World War II, the Cold War between the United States and Soviet Union ended with the dismantling of the Berlin Wall in Germany in 1989 and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. The lasting repercussions of the Cold War in American history continue to be debated by historians. The following viewpoint is excerpted from a 1992 article by John Lewis Gaddis, a professor of history at Yale University and the author of numerous books on the Cold War, including* Strategies of Containment *and* The Long Peace. *In his article, Gaddis notes that the Cold War was a period of relative peace compared to the conflicts that had preceded it. He disagrees with the claim that the Cold War was a simple struggle between two great powers or an example of American militarism. The Cold War was an ideological confrontation between the democracy of the United States and the communism of the Soviet Union, Gaddis states. It ended as a vindication of American values when the ideological underpinnings of the Soviet Union collapsed.*

What defense does Gaddis make of President Harry S. Truman's decisions at the beginning of the Cold War? How have many scholars been mistaken in their analysis of the Cold War, according to Gaddis? How, in his opinion, did nuclear weapons affect the course of the Cold War?

The Cold War was many things to many people. It was a division of the world into two hostile camps. It was a polarization of Europe in general, and of Germany in particular, into antagonistic spheres of influence. It was an ideological contest, some said between capitalism and communism, others said between democracy and authoritarianism. It was a competition for the allegiance of, and for influence over, the so-called Third World. It was a game of wits played out by massive intelligence organizations behind the scenes. It was a struggle that took place within each of its major adversaries as supporters and opponents of confrontation confronted one another. It was a contest that shaped culture, the social and natural sciences, and the writing of history. It was an arms race that held out the possibility—because it generated the capability—of ending civilization altogether. And it was a rivalry that even extended, at one point, beyond the bounds of earth itself, as human beings for the first time left their planet, but for a set of reasons that are likely to seem as parochial to future generations as those that impelled Ferdinand and Isabella to finance Columbus when he first set out for the New World five hundred years ago. . . .

When President Harry S. Truman told the Congress of the United States on 12 March 1947 that the world faced a struggle between two ways of life, one based on the will of the majority and the other based on the will of a minority forcibly imposed upon the majority, he had more than one purpose in mind. The immediate aim, of course, was to prod parsimonious legislators into approving economic and military assistance to Greece and Turkey, and a certain amount of rhetorical dramatization served that end. But President Truman also probably believed what he said, and most Americans and Europeans, at the time, probably agreed with him. Otherwise, the United States would hardly have been able to abandon its historic policy of peacetime isolationism and commit itself, not only to the Truman Doctrine, but to the much more ambitious Marshall Plan and eventually the North Atlantic Treaty Organization as well. Those plans worked, in turn, because most Europeans wanted them to. The danger at the time seemed to be real, and few people at the time had any difficulty in explaining what it was: freedom was under attack, and authoritarianism was threatening it.

In the years that followed, though, it became fashionable in academic circles to discount this argument. The Cold War, for many scholars, was not about ideology at all, but rather balances of power and spheres of influence; hence it differed little from other Great Power rivalries in modern and even ancient history. Others saw the Cold War as reflecting the demands of an unprecedentedly powerful American military-industrial complex that had set out to impose its hegemony over the rest of the earth. Students of Cold War origins never entirely

John Lewis Gaddis, "The Cold War, the Long Peace, and the Future," *Diplomatic History* 16 (Spring 1992).

neglected issues of ideology and principle, but few of them were prepared to say, as Truman had, that that conflict was *primarily* about the difference between freedom and its absence. Such a view seemed too naïve, too simplistic, and, above all, too self-righteous: politicians might say that kind of thing from public platforms, but professors in the classroom and in their scholarly monographs should not.

WHAT THE COLD WAR WAS ABOUT

As a result, it was left to the people of Eastern Europe and now the Soviet Union itself—through their own spontaneous but collective actions over the past three years—to remind us of a fact that many of us had become too sophisticated to see, which is that the Cold War really was about the imposition of autocracy and the denial of freedom. That conflict came to an end only when it became clear that authoritarianism could no longer be imposed and freedom could no longer be denied. That fact ought to make us look more seriously at how ideology contributed to the coming of the Cold War in the first place.

Much of twentieth-century history has revolved around the testing of a single idea: that one could transform the conduct of politics, government, and even human behavior itself into a "science" which would allow not only predicting the future but even, within certain limits, determining it. This search for a "science" of politics grew out of the revolution that had long since occurred in physics and biology: if scientific laws worked so well in predicting motions of the planets, the argument ran, why should similar laws not govern history, economics, and politics? Karl Marx certainly had such an approach in mind in the 1840s when he worked out his theory of dialectical materialism, which explicitly linked political and social consciousness to irreversible processes of economic development; his collaborator Friedrich Engels insisted in 1880 that the progression from feudalism through capitalism to socialism and ultimately communism was as certain as was the Darwinian process of natural selection.

This movement to transform politics into a science began, it is important to emphasize, with the best of intentions: its goal was to improve the human condition by making human behavior rational, enlightened, and predictable. And it arose as a direct response to abuses, excesses, and inequities that had grown out of the concept of freedom itself, as manifested in the mid-nineteenth century *laissez-faire* capitalism Marx had so strongly condemned.

But the idea of a "science" of politics was flawed from the beginning for the simple reason that human beings do not behave like the objects science studies. People are not laboratory mice; it is impossible to isolate them from the environment that surrounds them. They make judgments, whether rational or irrational, about the probable consequences of their actions, and they can change these actions accordingly. They learn from experience: the inheritance of acquired characteristics may not work in biology, the historian E. H. Carr once pointed out, but it does in history. As a result, people rarely act with the predictability of molecules combining in test tubes, or ball bearings rolling down inclined planes, or even the "dependent variables" that figure so prominently in the writings—and, increasingly, the equations—of our contemporary social scientists.

It was precisely frustration with this irritating unpredictability of human beings that led Lenin at the beginning of this century to invert Marx and make the state the instrument that was supposed to secure human freedom, rather than the obstacle that stood in the way of it. But that same problem of human intractability in turn caused Stalin to invert Lenin and make the state, its survival, and its total control of all its surroundings an end in itself, with a consequent denial of freedom that was as absolute as any autocrat has ever managed to achieve. A movement that had set out in 1848 to free the workers of the world from their chains had wound up, by 1948 and through the logic of its "scientific" approach to politics, insisting that the condition of being in chains was one of perfect freedom.

Anyone contemplating the situation in Europe at the end of World War II would have had good reason, therefore, to regard the very nature of Stalin's regime as a threat, and to fear its possible expansion. That expansion had already taken place in Eastern Europe and the Balkans, not so much because of Stalinism's accomplishments in and of themselves, but rather because of the opportunity created for it by the foolish behavior of the Europeans in allowing another flight from freedom—fascism—to take root among them. In one of history's many paradoxes, a successful, necessary, and wholly legitimate war against fascism created conditions more favorable to the spread of communism than that ideology could ever have managed on its own.

A REAL DANGER

The dangers Truman warned against in 1947, hence, were real enough. There is such a thing as bending before what one mistakenly believes to be the "wave of the future": fascism had gained its foothold in Europe by just these means. Many Europeans saw communism as such a wave following Hitler's defeat, not because they approved of that ideology, and not because they really expected the Red Army to drive all the way to the English Channel and the Pyrenees; the problem rather was that Europe had fallen into a demoralization so deep and so pervasive that Communists might have found paths to power there by constitutional means, much as the Nazis

had done in Germany in 1933. Had that happened there is little reason to believe that constitutional procedures would have survived, any more than they did under Hitler; certainly the experiences of Poland, Romania, Hungary, and, after February 1948, Czechoslovakia do not suggest otherwise. Stalin's system could have spread throughout Europe without Stalin having to lift a finger: that was the threat. The actions the United States took, through the Truman Doctrine, the Marshall Plan, and NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization), were seen at the time and I think will be seen by future historians as having restored self-confidence among the Europeans, as having preserved the idea of freedom in Europe by a narrow and precarious margin at a time when Europeans themselves, reeling from the effects of two world wars, had almost given up on it.

The idea of freedom proved more durable than the practice of authoritarianism, and as a consequence, the Cold War ended.

To be sure, some historians have claimed that Europe might have saved itself even if the Americans had done nothing. There is no way now to prove that they are wrong. But few Europeans saw things this way at the time, and that brings us to one of the most important distinctions that has to be made if we are to understand the origins, evolution, and subsequent end of the Cold War: it is that the expansion of American and Soviet influence into Europe—the processes that really began that conflict—did not take place in the same way and with the same results. The Soviet Union, acting from primarily defensive motives, imposed its sphere of influence directly on Eastern Europe and the Balkans, against the will of the people who lived there. The United States, also acting for defensive reasons, responded to invitations from desperate governments in Western Europe, the Mediterranean, and even the Middle East to create countervailing spheres of influence in those regions. Compared to the alternative, American hegemony—for there is no denying that such a thing did develop—definitely seemed the lesser of two evils.

This distinction between imposition and invitation—too easily lost sight of in too much of the writing that has been done about Cold War history—proved to be critical in determining not only the shape but also the ultimate outcome of the Cold War. The system the United States built in Western Europe quickly won legitimacy in the form of widespread popular support. The Warsaw Pact and the other instruments of Soviet control in Eastern Europe never did. This happened because Europeans at the time understood the difference between authoritarianism and its absence, just as more recent Europeans and now citizens of the former Soviet Union itself have come to understand it. Survivors of World War II had no more desire to embrace the Stalinist model of "scientific" politics than their children and grandchildren have had to remain under it. Moscow's authority in Eastern Europe turned out to be a hollow shell, kept in place only by the sheer weight of Soviet military power. Once it became apparent, in the late 1980s, that Mikhail Gorbachev's government was no longer willing (or able) to prop it up, the system Stalin had imposed upon half of Europe almost half a century earlier collapsed like a house of cards.

The way the Cold War ended, therefore, was directly related to the way in which it had begun. Perhaps Harry Truman had it right after all: the struggle really was, ultimately, about two ways of life, one that abandoned freedom in its effort to rationalize politics, and another that was content to leave politics as the irrational process that it normally is, thereby preserving freedom. The idea of freedom proved more durable than the practice of authoritarianism, and as a consequence, the Cold War ended.

The Cold War did, however, go on for an extraordinarily long period of time, during which the world confronted extraordinary perils. . . . How close we came to not surviving we will probably never know; but few people who lived through the Cold War took survival for granted during most of its history. The vision of a future filled with smoking, radiating ruins was hardly confined to writers of science fiction and makers of doomsday films; it was a constant presence in the consciousness of several generations after 1945, and the fact that that vision has now receded is of the utmost importance. . . .

Nuclear weapons have for so long been the subject of our nightmares—but sometimes also of our delusions of power—that it is difficult to answer this question dispassionately. We have tended to want to see these devices either as a Good Thing or a Bad Thing, and hence we have talked past one another most of the time. But the role of nuclear weapons in Cold War history was neither wholly good nor bad, which is to say, it was more interesting than either the supporters or the critics of these weapons have made it out to be.

THE BENEFITS OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS

Nuclear weapons were, of course, a very bad thing for the people of Hiroshima and Nagasaki; but those Americans and Japanese spared the necessity of additional killing as a result of their use might be pardoned for seeing some good in them. Nuclear weapons were a bad thing in that they greatly intensified the fears the principal Cold War adversaries had of one another, and that much of the rest of the world had of both of them. But they were a good thing in that they induced caution on the part of these two Great Powers, discouraging irresponsible behavior of the kind that almost all Great Powers in the past have sooner or later engaged in. Nuclear weapons were a bad thing in that they held the world hostage to what now seems the absurd concept of mutual assured destruction, but they were a good thing in that they probably perpetuated the reputations of the United States and the Soviet Union as superpowers, thereby allowing them to "manage" a world that might have been less predictable and more dangerous had Washington and Moscow not performed that function. Nuclear weapons were a bad thing in that they stretched out the length of the Cold War by making the costs of being a superpower bearable on both sides and for both alliances: if the contest had had to be conducted only with more expensive conventional forces, it might have ended long ago. But nuclear weapons were a good thing in that they allowed for the passage of time, and hence for the education of two competitors who eventually came to see that they did not have all that much to compete about in the first place.

It is important to remember, though, that the peaceful end to the Cold War we have just witnessed is not the *only* conceivable way the Cold War could have ended. In adding up that conflict's costs, we would do well to recognize that the time it took to conclude the struggle was not time entirely wasted. That time—and those costs—appear to us excessive in retrospect, but future historians may see those expenditures as long-term investments in ensuring that the Cold War ended peacefully. For what we wound up doing with nuclear weapons was buying time—the time necessary for the authoritarian approach to politics to defeat itself by nonmilitary means. And the passage of time, even if purchased at an exorbitant price has at last begun to pay dividends.

Viewpoint 36B

The Cold War Was Not a Great Victory for the United States (1993)

Wade Huntley

INTRODUCTION *The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 was hailed by many observers as a triumph for the United States and a vindication of its Cold War policies following World War II. A somewhat different perspective on the end of the Cold War is taken in the following viewpoint by Wade Huntley, then a professor of politics at Whitman College in Washington. Huntley examines the origins and development of the Cold War, including the writings of George Kennan (see viewpoint 25B), and concludes that Americans were taking too much credit for the Soviet Union's demise. Government actions during the Cold War—especially the massive military spending, CIA-sponsored coups against other nations, wars in Vietnam and other places, and nuclear arms development—compromised American ideals, spiritual values, and democratic institutions, he argues.*

What were the three unique features of the Cold War, according to Huntley? What lessons does he derive from the writings of George Kennan? In what ways is America the loser of the Cold War, in his view?

Who won the Cold War? The answer is not as obvious as public debate would make it seem. The question itself hides a deeper one: why did the Cold War end? this latter question is best addressed by reflecting briefly on why the Cold War began.

The Cold War emerged from the smoke and ashes of World War II, which left the United States and the Soviet Union as the two superpowers. Allies but never friends, tensions between the two countries soon congealed, the Iron Curtain fell, and the basic parameters of the next era of world politics were established.

COLD WAR FEATURES

Three features distinguished the Cold War from previous Great Power structures. First, the shift from a multipolar to a bipolar world centering on the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. altered the dynamics of great power behavior by hardening alliances and intensifying the rivalry. Secondly, the introduction of nuclear weapons focused the attention of the superpowers; in retrospect, the prospect of global nuclear war induced great caution by the leadership of both countries, perhaps also preventing a large-scale conventional war between them.

Finally, the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. were set apart not only by their competition for power, but by an unprecedented degree of ideological divisiveness. The two states differed on the most basic aspirations of the human experience and the political principles necessary to pursue them. It is this feature of the Cold War that is most crucial in explicating why and how the Cold War ended.

KENNAN'S FORESIGHT

The importance of this ideological divergence was apparent to sensitive observers from the beginning. We need look no further than George F. Kennan, the Department of State official who in 1947 originated the idea of "containment" of the Soviet Union that became a touchstone of U.S. policy throughout the Cold War. Mr. Kennan stressed the importance of Communist ideology in anticipating Soviet behavior: because its principles were "of long-term validity," the U.S.S.R. could "afford to be patient." Thus, Mr. Kennan expected Soviet leaders, unlike

Wade Huntley, "Who Won the Cold War?" *Chronicle of Higher Education*, March 31, 1993.

Napoleon or [Adolf] Hitler before them, to be willing to yield in particular encounters, but to be less likely to be discouraged by such passing defeats. The contest would be decided not by a key victory at some juncture, but by endurance of will over time.

If the United States could muster such will and sustain it over the long run, ultimately it would prevail. The reason was not simply U.S. military superiority over the U.S.S.R., but differences in the organizing principles of the two societies—the very differences in ideology that formed the core of the Cold War rivalry. Though World War II was but a few years past, already Mr. Kennan perceived the Soviet Union, unlike the United States, to be a nation at war with itself. Communist power and authority had been purchased only, he wrote, "at a terrible cost in human life and human hopes and energies." The Soviet people were "physically and spiritually tired," at the limits of their endurance. Thus, he concluded, "Soviet power-bears within it the seeds of its own decay."

It is well to remember Mr. Kennan's foresight in considering current explanations of the demise of the Soviet Union. Many scholars, seemingly more concerned with anticipating future great power configurations, take the end of the Cold War itself for granted. Perhaps more importantly, little of what scholarly attention has been paid to this question has filtered into public forums. There are (at least) four possible explanations for the end of the Cold War, only two of which have found their way into mainstream discourse in the U.S.

EXPLANATIONS FOR VICTORY

The first explanation is that the collapse of Soviet power is directly attributable to the confrontational policies pursued by the [Ronald] Reagan and [George H.W.] Bush Administrations. In other words, the Republicans won the Cold War. According to this story, the massive increases in defense spending and uncompromising stances toward the "evil empire" inaugurated in the early 1980s pressed the Soviet Union to the wall, beyond its material capacity to respond in kind.

The second popular explanation, mostly propounded by Democrats, is best termed the "me too" explanation. It holds that Presidents Reagan and Bush were not the first to confront the Soviets, and trots out hard-line rhetoric and policies from the [Harry S.] Truman to [John F.] Kennedy to [Jimmy] Carter Administrations. Adherents of this view want to insure that history remembers that both parties' leaders had fine moments of hard-headed intransigence.

Lost in this feeding frenzy of credit-taking have been two other possible explanations. The first is that the hard-line postures adopted by the U.S. throughout the Cold War actually did more harm than good. This view, though normally associated in the popular media with out-of-touch liberals and pacifists, has received respectable scholarly attention. According to this view, had it not been for a tendency toward wild-eyed anti-communism on the American side, the Soviet Union may have collapsed under its own weight much sooner than it did. The stridence and belligerency emanating from Washington, from the 1950 adoption of "NSC-68" onward, had little effect but to strengthen comparable hard-line views in the Kremlin.

George Kennan himself endorsed this view in a [1992] *New York Times* opinion piece. According to Mr. Kennan, the "greatest damage" was done not by the military policies themselves, but by the tone of those policies, which produced a "braking effect on all liberalizing tendencies in the regime." As Mr. Kennan concludes, "For this, both Democrats and Republicans have a share of the blame."

A final explanation concerning the end of the Cold War is that the policies of the United States, in substance as well as tone, were not really all that important in the course of Soviet events. This idea has rarely surfaced in public discussion, nor has it received much scholarly attention apart from Soviet specialists who have long stressed the importance of the Soviet Union's own domestic politics.

Kennan himself suggests this point, remarking, "The suggestion that any Administration had the power to influence decisively the course of a tremendous domestic political upheaval in another great country on another side of the globe is simply childish."

From this viewpoint, the only role which the United States had was indirect, in the alternative it presented to communism merely by its existence. The success of American political institutions themselves, rather than the particular policies promulgated through them, set the standard the Soviet Union could not match.

Let us push the ramifications of this final hypothesis a bit further. If Soviet-style communism truly was consumed by the poverty of its own principles, independent of U.S. policies, how should those policies be judged? Perhaps it was not only belligerent rhetoric which was extraneous to the downfall of the U.S.S.R. The U.S. may have needlessly spent billions of dollars on high-technology weapons systems, and tragically sacrificed tens of thousands of American lives in faraway jungles. Perhaps, in setting out to break the back of Soviet Communism, the U.S. simply broke its own bank instead.

SPIRITUAL COSTS

The cost of the Cold War to the United States may have been even steeper spiritually than materially. In 1947 Kennan singled out one standard above military prowess or economic muscle which the Cold War would test: "To avoid destruction the United Stales need only measure up to its own best traditions and prove itself worthy of preservation as a great nation."

Considering what might have been, the United States was a loser in the Cold War, not its winner.

Now, with the Cold War behind us, can it truly be said that we passed this test? The paranoid red-baiting of Joseph McCarthy, the cynicism of secret CIA-sponsored coups overturning elected regimes, the breached trust of Watergate, the duplicity of the Iran-Contra affair, all add up to a weighty and depressing litany of failures. . . . Too often both leaders and the public were willing to compromise American principles and ideals (not to mention law) in the name of fighting communism.

The United States emerged from the Cold War overarmed, burdened by debt and poverty, and carrying numerous scars from self-inflicted wounds to cherished institutions—all for the sake of the superpower competition. In forging itself into a hard-line Cold War warrior, the U.S. ultimately undermined its "best traditions" more than it measured up to them. Had its leaders and citizens demonstrated greater faith in the strength of the nation's founding principles, the U.S. might have emerged from the Cold War contest economically leaner, brighter of spirit, and with its democratic institutions and values far stronger. And, to the extent that its course also diminished the potency of the alternative it posed to Soviet totalitarianism, the U.S. might have emerged from the Cold War sooner as well.

Who, then, really won the Cold War? Not the Republicans, nor the Democrats. Considering what might have been, the United States was a loser in the Cold War, not its winner.

LESSONS FOR THE FUTURE

If this conclusion is valid, it suggests some crucial lessons for the future. The United States now shoulders a burden of world leadership perhaps unprecedented in its history. Realists are right in suggesting that, despite the most benign intentions, this new preeminence could generate more new enemies than friends. Minimizing this tendency requires reinforcing what has always been the most important American task in the world: to hold out, chiefly by its own example, a beacon illuminating the path to freedom.

To meet the added challenges of the new era, the United States has simply to follow the sage council of Polonius: above all, to thine own self be true. Should Americans fail to learn this, perhaps the deepest lesson of the Cold War's end, the U.S. may come to lose the post-Cold War as well.

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