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# Reflections on George F. Kennan:

Scholar and Policymaker

*Conference Proceedings*

Edited by F. Joseph Dresen



OCCASIONAL PAPER #300

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Washington, D.C.

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# Panelist Biographies

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He also edited and introduced a new edition of *The God That Failed* (Columbia, 2001), and co-edited *Staging Growth: Modernization, Development, and the Global Cold War* (also contributing an article, “East Meets West: The Center for International Studies and Indian Economic Development”). Other articles have appeared in *American Historical Review*, *Cahiers du Monde russe*, *Diplomatic History*, *Journal of Cold War Studies*, *Kritika*, *Modern Intellectual History*, and other journals.

His current project, “Know Your Enemy: America’s Russia Experts and the Making of the Cold War,” has been supported by fellowships from the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Radcliffe Institute, as well as research grants from the Gilder-Lehrman Institute of American History, the Kennan Institute, and the Rockefeller Archive Center.

**John Lewis Gaddis**, Robert A. Lovett Professor of Military and Naval History and Distinguished Fellow in Grand Strategy, joined the Yale faculty in 1997. He currently directs the Brady-Johnson Program in Grand Strategy at Yale, and has also served as Acting Director of International Security Studies and as Chair of the International Affairs Council at the MacMillan Center for International and Area Studies. His most recent books are *The Landscape of History: How Historians Map the Past* (2002); *Surprise, Security and the American Experience* (2004); *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of American National Security Policy during the Cold War* (revised and updated edition, 2005); and *The Cold War: A New History* (2005). He is currently working on a biography of George F. Kennan. Professor Gaddis teaches Cold War history, biog-

raphy, and grand strategy at Yale. He was the 2003 recipient of the William Clyde DeVane award for undergraduate teaching, and in 2005 was awarded the National Humanities Medal by President George W. Bush.

**Allen Lynch** is the Hugh S. & Winifred B. Cumming Memorial Chair in International Affairs and Director of the Center for Russian and East European Studies at the University of Virginia. His current research interests include Russian foreign policy, Russian politics in comparative perspective, and relationships between international order and political development. In 2006, he received an All-University Teaching Award. His books include: *How Russia Is—Not—Ruled: Reflections on Russian Political Development* (UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005); *Does Russia Have a Democratic Future?* (New York: Foreign Policy Association, 1997); *Europe from the Balkans to the Urals: the Disintegration of Yugoslavia and the USSR and International Politics* (UK: Oxford University Press, 1996) (with Reneo Lukic); *The Cold War Is Over—Again* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992); *The Soviet Breakup and U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York: Foreign Policy Association, 1992); and *The Soviet Study of International Relations* (UK: Cambridge University Press, 1987, 1989), which received the Marshall D. Shulman Award of the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies. His articles have appeared in *Foreign Affairs*, *Foreign Policy*, *Europe-Asia Studies*, and other international and U.S. journals. He has held a number of visiting appointments at European institutions including: the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, Paris; Free University of Berlin; Deutsche Gesellschaft fuer Auswaertige Politik, Berlin; the Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute, Munich; and the Institut des Hautes Etudes Internationales, Geneva. He is an Honorary Fellow of the Foreign Policy Association.

**Jack F. Matlock, Jr.**, a retired diplomat, has held the following academic posts since 1991: Adjunct Professor of International Relations at Columbia University from 2007, Sol Linowitz

Professor of International Relations, Hamilton College, 2006; visiting professor and lecturer in public and international affairs at Princeton University, 2001–2004; George F. Kennan Professor at the Institute for Advanced Study, 1996–2001; Senior Research Fellow and then Kathryn and Shelby Cullom Davis Professor in the Practice of International Diplomacy at Columbia University, 1991 to 1996.

During his 35 years in the American Foreign Service (1956–1991) he served as Ambassador to the Soviet Union from 1987 to 1991, Special Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs and Senior Director for European and Soviet Affairs on the National Security Council Staff from 1983 until 1986, and Ambassador to Czechoslovakia from 1981 to 1983.

Before his appointment to Moscow as Ambassador, Mr. Matlock served three tours at the American Embassy in the Soviet Union, as Vice Consul and Third Secretary (1961–63), Minister Counselor and Deputy Chief of Mission (1974–1978), and Chargé d’Affaires *ad interim* in 1981. His other Foreign Service assignments were in Vienna, Munich, Accra, Zanzibar and Dar es Salaam, in addition to tours in Washington as Director of Soviet Affairs in the State Department (1971–74) and as Deputy Director of the Foreign Service Institute (1979–80). Before entering the Foreign Service Mr. Matlock was Instructor in Russian Language and Literature at Dartmouth College (1953–56). During the 1978–79 academic year he was Visiting Professor of Political Science at Vanderbilt University.

He is the author of *Reagan and Gorbachev: How the Cold War Ended* (Random House, 2004, paperback edition 2005); *Autopsy on an Empire: The American Ambassador’s Account of the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (Random House, 1995); and a handbook to the thirteen-volume Russian edition of Stalin’s *Collected Works* (Washington, D.C. 1955, 2nd edition, New York, 1971).

Mr. Matlock was born in Greensboro, North Carolina, on October 1, 1929, and was educated at Duke University (AB, *summa cum laude*, 1950) and at Columbia University (MA and Certificate of the Russian Institute, 1952). He has been awarded honorary doctorates by four institutions. In addition to the books noted, he is the author of numerous articles on foreign policy, international relations, and Russian literature and history.

**Angela Stent** is Director of the Center for Eurasian, Russian and East European Studies in the Georgetown School of Foreign Service and Professor of Government and Foreign Service at Georgetown University. She is also a Senior Fellow (non-resident) at the Brookings Institution. From 2004–2006 she served as National Intelligence Officer for Russia and Eurasia at the National Intelligence Council. From 1999 to 2001, she served in the Office of Policy Planning at the U.S. Department of State. An expert on Russian and Soviet politics and foreign policy, and on German foreign policy, she has published widely on: Soviet relations with Europe and the United States; Russian foreign policy; West and East German foreign policy; and East-West trade and technology transfer. Her publications include: *Russia and Germany Reborn: Unification, The Soviet Collapse and The New Europe* (Princeton University Press, 1999); *From Embargo to Ostpolitik: The Political Economy of West German-Soviet Relations, 1955–1980* (Cambridge University Press, 1981); “America and Russia: Paradoxes of Partnership” in *Russia’s Engagement with the West* (M.E. Sharpe, 2005); “Russia: Farewell to Empire?” in *World Policy Journal*, and “America, Russia and Europe: A Realignment?” in *Survival*. She has been a consultant to the U.S. Congress’ Office of Technology Assessment, is a member of the Council on Foreign Relations and has served on their Committee on Studies. She has participated in various task forces of the Council on Foreign Relations, including those on U.S.-Russian Relations, Transatlantic Relations and on NATO Enlargement. She is on the editorial boards of the *Journal of Cold War Studies*, *World Policy Journal* and *Internationale Politik*. She is on the International Advisory Board of *Russia Profile*. She is on the Executive Board of the U.S.-Russia Business Forum and is a member of the Advisory Boards of Women in International Security and of Supporters of Civil Society in Russia. She is on the Academic Advisory Board of the American Institute for Contemporary German Studies. Dr. Stent received her B.A. from Cambridge University, her MSc. from the London School of Economics and Political Science and her M.A. and Ph.D. from Harvard University.

# Opening Remarks

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**Blair Ruble:** This is a very special event for us, and we are pleased that all of you have been able to join us. I want to thank the speakers and members of the Kennan family. I also want to thank all the members of the audience. We are approaching what would have been George F. Kennan's 103rd birthday on February 16 and the second anniversary of his death on March 17, 2005.

He shared a birthday with the gentleman after which he and our institute are named, George Kennan the Elder. Taken together, the story of both Kennans encompasses about three-quarters of the two centuries of U.S.–Russian official diplomatic relations. They were both remarkable human beings, and they had a remarkable impact over a very long period of time on how Americans think about Russia. It is difficult to think of another example of two people who shaped the American understanding of another country the way George Frost Kennan (George Kennan the Younger) and George Kennan the Elder did.

George Frost Kennan is one of the most influential men of the 20th century. He became what every Washington policy wonk really wants to be. He shaped American policy for half a century by writing a telegram, and I think that there must be generations of Foreign Service officers who dream of writing such a telegram. Over the last decade, we have seen people muse about who will be the next George Kennan. There is only one George Kennan, of course, and one of the reasons for that is that the depth that went into that telegram came out of a lifetime of being a scholar. He represents, in my view, the most productive interaction between scholarship and policy. I often think of him when we have discussions in Washington about how policy and scholarly institutions need to demonstrate measurable results in addressing the policy issues of the day. If you look at the career of George Kennan, he was only able to have the impact he had because he was both a scholar

and a policymaker. We wanted this conference to reflect his contributions in both capacities.

I also want to say that I think he is perhaps least appreciated as a great person of American letters in the 20th century. He won two Pulitzers and a National Book Award. I think anybody who has tried to write understands what a beautiful writer he is. While I think this may be the most overlooked part of Kennan's legacy, what may be the most lasting part are just simply his words on paper.

I once remember hearing Marshall Shulman at, I believe, the Council on Foreign Relations' celebration of Professor Kennan's 90th birthday. He paraphrased Mark Twain on Wagner, saying: "I have to tell all my students before they read Kennan that he sounds better than he really is." That is the mark of a great writer.

As we approach these anniversaries, we thought it would be time to step back a bit and reflect on this remarkable human being, the person who founded our particular institution. We are very fortunate to have a remarkable lineup of speakers. Before we begin, I would like to acknowledge the contribution of John Hardt in suggesting and encouraging the organization of this conference.

The first panel will feature Ambassador Jack F. Matlock, Jr. He is a former George F. Kennan Professor at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, and former U.S. ambassador to the USSR.

He will be followed by Angela Stent, professor of government and director of the Center for Eurasian, Russian and East European Studies at Georgetown University.

I also want to say that Jack Matlock was a stalwart member of the Kennan Institute Advisory Council. It probably is not too much of an exaggeration to say that given some of the challenges we faced at the time, we likely would not have a Kennan Institute today if it were not for a lot of the actions that Jack took in concert with Professor Kennan, so it is always a pleasure to welcome Jack.



# Panel 1: George F. Kennan the Policymaker

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**Jack F. Matlock, Jr.:** Thank you very much. It is a real honor to be here and to share some thoughts about George Kennan. When I was a young Foreign Service officer specializing in Russia for many years, he served as a role model in respect to what one could achieve by learning about the country and understanding it, and then having the opportunity to have that knowledge actually reflected in American policy. This was true even though we did not accept his judgment regarding all the issues of the day. His example served as a challenge for all of us, and I think that virtually all Foreign Service officers of my generation were very much immersed in Kennan's writings. I was a rather senior Foreign Service officer before I met him personally, but I later got to know him very well.

Now in commenting on him as a policymaker and diplomat, I hope you will forgive me if I draw very heavily on an article I wrote for a French publication last year. I doubt if many people read it, especially in the United States. The publication is called *La Politique Américaine*, and I will draw on some of the remarks I made there and amplify them.

As Blair indicated, one of Kennan's most notable achievements was his concept of containment. A diplomat in Moscow at the time, he sent his famous "Long Telegram" on February 22, 1946, less than a year after World War II ended. At that time the United States was still uncertain about what the future relationship with the Soviet Union would be. We had a wartime alliance which had frayed, particularly in the latter years of the war. But there were still those in Washington who had a dream that somehow Stalin's Soviet Union could be a partner in the reconstruction of Europe and in the construction of a new world order, though it was not called that at the time.

Ambassador Harriman had left Kennan in temporary charge of the American embassy in Moscow, and Kennan used a query from the Department of the Treasury as to why the Soviets were not more enthusiastic about supporting the Bretton Woods concept of mone-

etary reform, as an excuse to explain the realities of dealing with Stalin's Soviet Union. In essence, he explained why Stalin would not and could not cooperate with the United States. In his words, "we have here a political force committed fanatically to the belief that with [the] U.S. there can be no permanent *modus vivendi*, that it is desirable and necessary that the internal harmony of our society be disrupted, our traditional way of life be destroyed, the international authority of our state be broken, if Soviet power is to be secure." In other words, the Soviet regime not only would not cooperate, it had to act as an enemy to the United States in order to preserve its power. This was a profound insight.

Kennan went on to say that this did not mean that war between the United States and the Soviet Union was inevitable—far from it. Despite Soviet attitudes that made genuine cooperation impossible, the Soviet Union was far weaker than the United States. Stalin was more circumspect than Hitler. In Kennan's words, he was "more sensitive to the logic of force." And the Soviet state was beset with a host of internal problems, not the least being the loss of revolutionary élan among the population as a whole. In sum, the United States should act to contain Soviet expansionism, which might seem to validate its false ideological premises, but had no need to use or threaten force to remove the communist regime.

Kennan's suggested policy of containment remained the foundation of U.S. policy towards the Soviet Union throughout the entire postwar period—at least until 1989, when it was apparent that Mikhail Gorbachev was altering the very nature of Soviet rule. Periodically, the concept was challenged in American political campaigns, especially in 1952 with the Republican slogan of "roll back the curtain," but in practice, containment remained the order of the day. When a revolt in Hungary threatened to take that country out of the Warsaw Pact in 1956, the Republican administration, which—by the way—had rejected Kennan, did nothing concretely to assist the Hungarian rebels.

Kennan himself came close to disowning the containment doctrine when he was out of the government, feeling that American administrations had relied too much on military force. But every postwar administration in fact followed a policy of containment, as opposed to liberation, in dealing with the Soviet Union. This approach ultimately brought about the result Kennan had predicted as early as the 1930s, when as a junior diplomat in Moscow he observed that communist rule would ultimately succumb to the internal contradictions it had engendered.

Kennan's second historic achievement as a diplomat was conceiving and helping design the Marshall Plan to assist the reconstruction of Europe following World War II. This policy represented a radical shift from normal great power politics following wars. It was designed to help put the countries of Europe back on their feet following the war's devastation, and it treated the defeated and victors alike. It was also designed to encourage European economic and political cooperation to avoid the sort of intra-European struggles that had plunged the continent into repeated wars in the past. It was not designed to exclude the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. In fact, Kennan advised explicitly that it must be offered to all the victors. It was Stalin who decided that the Soviet Union would turn it down. (I'm sure that was no surprise whatever to Kennan, but it was important that the offer be made.) Stalin also forced the Poles and the Czechs, who were originally inclined to accept it, to refuse it. This again demonstrated the wisdom of Kennan's earlier comment that Stalin had to establish a hostile relationship with the United States to preserve his own power.

Despite these remarkable successes, Kennan's preferences for U.S. policy began to diverge from the judgment of his political superiors, particularly when Dean Acheson replaced George Marshall as U.S. Secretary of State. Kennan objected to a NATO alliance that would have required the permanent stationing of American troops in Europe. He opposed the rearmament of Germany, and he favored an attempt to offer the Soviet Union a neutral Germany if it would agree to an independent united Germany. At a time when Soviet military strength seemed to be growing, and its grip on those East European countries it had occupied during the war was tightening, it is easy to see that Kennan's ideas would have

found scant support in the United States or, for that matter, in those European countries that had been allied with the United States and Great Britain during that war.

This brings us to one of the defects in Kennan's record as a diplomat and policymaker. At least, it is a defect in my view. While he was most attentive to the traditions and political conditions of the major countries with which the United States dealt, he refused as a matter of principle to take into consideration political conditions in the United States itself. He defended this attitude in his most self-reflective book *Around the Cragged Hill*, which was published in 1993. He wrote:

"In the days of my directorship at the State Department Policy Planning Staff, I was sometimes urged to take into account in our recommendations to the Secretary of State the domestic political aspects of the recommendation in question. 'Should you not warn the Secretary,' it was asked of me, 'of the domestic political problems this recommendation would present and make suggestions as to how they might be met?' I resisted firmly all such pressures. Our duty, I insisted, was to tell the President and the Secretary what in our view was in the national interest. It was their duty, if they accepted the force of our recommendations, to see how far these could be reconciled with domestic political realities. This was a duty that they were far better fitted to perform than we were."

I find this attitude questionable on at least two accounts. First, it assumes that there is some precise concept of the "national interest" that reasonable and well-informed officials can reach without reference to political realities. Second, it places too great a burden on the president and secretary of state to have them shoulder the entire responsibility of convincing the legislature and public at large of the wisdom of a given policy. By the way, I am sure that George Kennan would never have hesitated to testify in favor of policies to Congress. That was not his point. His point was that foreign policy advisors should not take these matters into account when giving advice.

Nevertheless, the constitution does require the president to seek the advice and consent of

the Senate, and it requires a president to obtain funding for any policies that require it, and most do, from the House of Representatives and the Senate. Without some communication with the public at large, it would be very difficult to carry the day in Congress itself. It is true that the president and secretary of state must lead the effort in selling a policy to the public and the Congress, but they do deserve the full support of their staffs in doing so. Indeed, while Kennan is right that one should not simply base recommendations on the basis of partisan politics, or even perhaps let partisan politics enter into it, if one does not take into consideration what is politically possible or take into consideration steps that must be taken to prepare the public and the Congress for a change in policy, then the policy is going to seem very unrealistic to political superiors.

In fact, Kennan's advice by the early 1950s seemed to Secretary of State Acheson increasingly unrealistic, and Kennan was allowed to leave the State Department temporarily to think about policy issues in the unconstrained but stimulating intellectual environment at the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton. Except for a two-year stint as ambassador to Yugoslavia in the Kennedy administration, George Kennan spent the rest of his life at the Institute, and his work there is going to be the subject of the next panel.

Blair has already referred to Kennan's eloquence and style and how important this was, and I think this is absolutely true. Actually, a persuasive style in a bureaucracy can almost become a liability. It is said, and maybe with some factual basis, that Acheson sometimes would ask staffers to translate Kennan's recommendations into bureaucratese so that he could weigh them properly against other recommendations, because Kennan could be so persuasive in an emotional way. Yet that trait also led him at times to go overboard and exaggerate certain factors in order to make a point.

I think one of the most difficult periods of Kennan's life as a diplomat and policymaker was his ambassadorship in Moscow. He was called back, despite his problems with Acheson, and sent out by President Truman and Acheson to be ambassador to Moscow. One can tell from his memoirs, and also from the accounts of junior diplomats who were there at the time, that it was a miserable time for him. He found himself

cut off from Soviet society and bereft of any real instructions from an administration that had given up on dealing with Stalin. I think this led him to a sense of despair, and also led him to make a statement to a correspondent while attending a meeting outside the Soviet Union saying that life in Moscow at that time reminded him of life in Hitler's Germany when the war began. This of course was just the pretext Stalin needed to get rid of him. According to Alexander Bessmertnykh, who was briefly Soviet Foreign Minister under Gorbachev, the Soviets had broken our cypher at that point and had read the Long Telegram. Stalin was well aware of Kennan's views and considered him an enemy, and was in fact looking for some pretext to expel him.

From then on, it seemed to many people who read Kennan's works that he was almost always at odds with most foreign policy stances of both Democratic and Republican administrations. But if we review his statements and then look at them in comparison as to what the policy was, we discover something of a paradox. Those of us in the government who knew the Soviet Union and dealt with its government recognized how profoundly correct much of Kennan's analysis was. Nevertheless, we disagreed with many of the conclusions he drew regarding American policy at the time. He was the author of containment, but by the early 1960s he began to disown his own intellectual offspring.

The problem was that our policymakers concluded that containment of the Soviet Union required a greater measure of military pressure than Kennan thought necessary. The disagreement therefore was not over whether the Soviet Union should be contained, as opposed to liberated, but over the methods used to achieve this end. American officials thought they were doing what was necessary to contain the Soviet Union and to avoid direct conflict that would have risked igniting a nuclear war. George Kennan believed that political pressures could provide adequate containment, but there were powerful reasons to question that judgment. For this reason, from the early 1950s through the 1970s, whether we had a Democratic or Republican administration, it seemed to most observers that Kennan's views were completely out of step with American policy.

The disagreements became particularly acute when Ronald Reagan was elected president in

1980. Kennan detested the rhetoric that implied that America had a leadership role in the “free world” (I put it in quotes because it is a term that I do not believe Kennan used very much, if at all), and he considered the increased American defense budgets as intended to equip the United States to fight a senseless and suicidal war. He feared that the United States and the Soviet Union were on a collision course.

This, in fact, was not the case. Reagan’s military buildup was actually started by his predecessor, and was intended to give the president the strength to negotiate the sort of agreements that Kennan favored. Nevertheless, the rhetoric that offended Kennan’s sensibilities blinded him to the real substance of American policy and to developments in the Soviet Union that increased the probability that American policy would eventually achieve its aims.

Toward the end of 1983, President Reagan decided to deliver a major address with his ideas for dealing with the Soviet Union. He wanted to stress the possibilities of cooperation and to make practical suggestions for approaching the key problems that divided the United States and the USSR. He proposed searching for ways to reduce tensions, to reduce weaponry, to withdraw from military competition in third countries, and to cooperate to improve people’s lives in both countries. Though drafted in December 1983, the speech was delivered on January 16, 1984.

At that time, I was responsible for Soviet affairs on the National Security Council staff, and I took the initiative to telephone Kennan several days before the speech was delivered to brief him on its content and to solicit his reaction. He was delighted. Before our conversation ended he said, almost wistfully, “You know, you’re the first government official who has ever called me to consult on any policy matter since I left the Foreign Service.” I do not know whether this was literally true, but if there had been other consultations he had forgotten them. He was enthusiastic about the approach the president’s speech set forth.

After that, there were fewer occasions when he saw fit to speak out in opposition to current American policy. He approved of most of the things we were doing when he understood them. And this suggests that if there had been more communication between Kennan and the policymakers, Kennan’s views might have been moderated. I think his views would not have

been basically changed, but perhaps some of the statements that seemed more extreme than the situation required could have been avoided.

Another question is whether Kennan’s views were in fact so much out of tune with government policy during the Cold War as it seemed at the time. He obviously came to conclusions that differed from official policy on many issues. Nevertheless, if we look beyond the specific issues, we will find that Kennan’s analysis of a situation was consistent with the assumptions that the U.S. government usually made in forming its Soviet policy, and particularly with those that President Reagan came to espouse. That will seem paradoxical to some people. It would be the last thing many people would think, yet let’s look at some of the basics.

First, as Kennan wrote repeatedly, one must engage one’s adversaries. He fully favored diplomacy to prevent dangerous confrontations. This was precisely where President Reagan normally came down, even in the face of advice from some of his most trusted advisors who thought that the Soviet Union had to change before the United States could deal with its leaders effectively. Reagan rejected the proposition that we had to force the Soviet Union to change before we talked. He understood, as did George Kennan, that military pressure alone was unlikely to bring about the internal changes the Soviet Union needed.

Second, there was a shared view regarding arms reduction. Kennan observed in his memoirs:

“Armaments are a function and not a cause of political tensions, and no limitation of armaments on a multilateral scale can be effective so long as the political problems are not tackled and regulated in some realistic way.”

President Reagan did not have the eloquence of Kennan’s prose but he often said, “Nations do not fear each other because they are armed. They are armed because they fear each other.” Perhaps that is not always true, but it is the same thought Kennan had expressed. Both felt that we needed to get at the political problems if we were to reduce armaments. It was not just a matter of finding some magical formula for stability, which so many of our arms control experts worked at and worked at very sincerely. You had to go beyond that. Just before Reagan went to

his first meeting with Gorbachev in November 1985, he wrote a memorandum in which he made it clear that one of his principal goals was to establish a basis of trust that would permit the rapid and radical reduction of nuclear weapons.

Furthermore, both Kennan and Reagan made a sharp distinction between the Soviet Union and the communist system on the one hand and Russia on the other. Not all of our political leaders have understood the difference. Kennan never forgot that communism had been imposed upon Russia: understanding the difference between the communist system and Russian character was important.

President Reagan showed his understanding of this point during his visit to Moscow in 1988 when he was asked, “Do you still think this is an evil empire?” And he replied, “No, that was another time, another era,” and went on to endorse Mikhail Gorbachev’s reforms. The problem was not Russia, the problem was communism. This was something both Kennan and Reagan understood.

Their ideas were also very close when it came to nuclear weapons. Kennan wrote at great length on nuclear weapons, stressing their dangers. Still, he could not have hated them any more than Ronald Reagan. They came to different conclusions at times. Reagan’s conclusion was to seek a defense so we could abolish the weapons; Kennan did not agree with that project. But the conviction that we must find a way to put the world on a path toward eliminating nuclear weapons was common to both.

Finally, among the similarities that come to mind, both men objected to what Kennan called liberationist slogans, which had been used particularly in 1952 to attack his containment policy. Reagan also refused to play the nationality card—attempts to stir up the non-Russian population of the Soviet Union. While he thought that the independence of the Baltic countries should be restored, he did not set out to bring the Soviet Union down, despite the claims of some of his more enthusiastic supporters after the fact. Reagan tried to use U.S. strength to convince the Soviet leaders they could not win an arms race and would not be allowed to dominate other countries by military force. He tried to change Soviet behavior, not to destroy the Soviet Union.

Kennan’s view and the official view tended to converge as Mikhail Gorbachev responded posi-

tively to the policies Reagan articulated. At the most fundamental level, the idea that the Soviet Union faced serious internal tensions and would not last forever suggested that it was unwise and unnecessary to threaten the Soviet state. Opposing Soviet attempts to gain advantage outside its borders by using or sponsoring military force is one thing; threatening the Soviet Union itself was something else, something the United States carefully avoided.

George Kennan’s disagreements with specific U.S. policies should not blind us to the fact that overall American policy was in fact more consistent with Kennan’s analysis than Kennan himself recognized. The attitudes and assumptions at the foundation of Kennan’s ideas were shared by key government officials who advised the president, and they struck a responsive chord with President Reagan in particular. I would not say that Reagan learned from Kennan directly but rather that he came to share many of Kennan’s perceptions.

George Kennan wrote in 1951, “If it should turn out to be the will of fate that freedom should come to Russia by an erosion from despotism rather than by the violent upthrust of liberty, let us be able to say that our policy was such as to favor it, and that we did not hamper it by preconception or impatience or despair.” I think that advice would be very useful to us to think of today, particularly after reading another Russia-bashing editorial in the *Washington Post* this morning.

Forty years after that was written officials of the Reagan and first Bush administration could honestly say that American policy had met the standard Kennan had set. Communist rule ended in the Soviet Union precisely as George Kennan had predicted, almost sixty years earlier, as a result of internal contradictions and not because of pressure from the outside.

**Angela Stent:** Thank you, Blair, for inviting me to this symposium. I must say one of the great pleasures when I was preparing for my paper was rereading Kennan’s memoirs and some of his other writings—he was indeed such a gifted writer.

Twenty years ago, I took part in a conference, which John Gaddis and Terry Deibel organized, at the National Defense University in honor of George Kennan. He himself attended it, and it later resulted in a book titled *Containment: Concept and Policy*, so I am very

glad that we are holding another conference twenty years later. John and I were recalling how it was a very interesting conference. But some of the people, particularly the more conservative political participants who came to that conference, attacked George Kennan personally. That was perhaps not anticipated, but he was and remains a controversial figure.

I realize that the Kennan Institute had to divide the symposium into panels, but I think it is very difficult to separate Kennan the policymaker from Kennan the scholar and the historian, because his deep insights into Russian history informed very much his views on Russia policy, as did, of course, his views of the United States.

I worked on the State Department's Policy Planning Staff for two years, from 1999 to 2001, and I remember how I always liked to look at the picture of the first head of Policy Planning, George Kennan, sitting there with his staff. I think there were only five of them on the Policy Planning staff in the beginning. You look at these photos and the staff is depicted as thoughtful gentlemen discussing issues with the composure of people who have leisure. Maybe it is an illusion, but that is what it looked like. And then I think about the harried denizens of the current Policy Planning Staff, and I think it must have been much better in the late 1940s.

I am going to talk about containment today, and there will be some overlap with what Jack Matlock said, but hopefully not too much. I am also going to focus on economic containment, which is something I looked at when I took part in the conference on containment twenty years ago. Then I am going to say something about Kennan's views about American policy, very much following what Jack has said. Finally, I will come back to a question with which I think we have to grapple today when we look at Putin's Russia, and that is how much of the problem in dealing with Russia was the communist system, and how much of the problem lay in traditional Russian political culture. In other words, was Russia difficult because it was communist or because it was Russia? Here I think I am going to somewhat disagree with Jack, because while Kennan blamed communism, he also understood there were historical traits in the Russian character and in Russian history that made Russia, irrespective of whether or not it was communist, difficult to deal with and shaped how it dealt with the outside world.

I want to go back to Riga, and begin with how George Kennan developed his views of Russia that led him to come up with the theory of containment. What is the intellectual history of the theory? He was chosen to be trained as a Russia expert, as we have heard, and he was sent first to Berlin and then to Riga to study Russia and to learn the language. Of course, the Baltic States had just recently become independent. He joined the U.S. Legation in Riga in 1921, and he describes Riga in those days as a lively cosmopolitan city, a cultural *mélange* of Latvian, German, Russian, Yiddish, and other different influences that made it such a lively city. His teachers in this Paris on the Baltic were highly cultivated Russian *émigrés*. They were well-educated intellectuals from the pre-revolutionary era, but their lives had been destroyed by the Russian revolution. Obviously, that is where he came to form some of his early views about the destructive nature of the Bolshevik revolution.

He also was annoyed by the fact that the Soviet regime assumed that all of the Americans in the legation in Riga were spies. He thought that was wrong. So he came away from that experience in Riga believing very strongly that the Soviets were only capable of viewing the world through a dialectical lens, and that the outside world would always be their enemy, and I think this was a very important influence on him. He realized that these views were also part of a historical cycle of fear of insecurity, that the USSR had a fundamentally dialectical and hostile view of the outside world. He wrote in his memoirs that as a result of his time in Riga, "Never did I consider the Soviet Union a fit ally or associate, actual or potential, for this country."

Of course, Kennan was a very complex person. He liked to depict himself as a realist, but I think he was very much an idealist as well. He was critical of the cynical and repressive manifestations of Soviet power. But he did develop an affinity for the Russian people and their culture. I agree with Jack that he had tremendous admiration for the Russian people for their ability to withstand suffering, for their great literature, and for their language. He very much admired and respected all of that, and he felt great sympathy for the intellectuals who taught him, whose lives had been destroyed by the Bolsheviks. He wrote, "The Russian people were a great and appealing people."

Then he arrived at the newly opened U.S. Embassy in Moscow. He lived in the Hotel National, which was not the luxurious hotel that it is today. It was astonishing when I read this in his memoirs, because I am familiar with the organization of the U.S. Embassy in Moscow now, but then there were few security measures. This was in the early 1930s at the U.S. embassy, and I quote, “No codes, no safes, no couriers, no security officers and regular telegraphs were used for communication with Washington.” He also realized that in Stalin’s Russia, his Soviet interlocutors assumed that every foreigner was a spy.

Once the war in Europe had broken out, he was serving in Berlin. We heard this from Jack Matlock, but he stressed that his experiences in Nazi Germany had a profound effect on his understanding of the USSR and its imperial policies in the postwar world. So he did see a similarity between the two systems, and we know that got him into tremendous trouble in the end when he was at the Moscow embassy.

By the time he came to write the Long Telegram, he had more than fifteen years of Russian experience. He was also keenly aware of the short attention span of U.S. policymakers and of members of Congress. There is one wonderful vignette in his memoirs where he describes a gullible member of Congress meeting with Stalin and admiring him uncritically. Kennan was really troubled, and we have heard about this from Jack, by the naiveté, as he saw it, of U.S. policymakers who looked forward to the postwar collaboration with the Soviet Union. That is when he produced this rather stark set of recommendations for dealing with the Soviets that were part of the Long Telegram, which of course made his reputation. He warned U.S. policymakers not to assume a commonality of aims with the Soviets that did not exist, not to act chummy with them, and not to make requests of them unless we would take measures of them if they did not fulfill the request. In other words, he wanted U.S. policymakers to be consistent and to respond in kind if the Soviets did not respond to what they were supposed to do. We should insist, he argued, that they take responsibility for their actions, and not shy away from public confrontation with them. But he concluded that we should also expand our representation in the Soviet Union.

In his Mr. X article, which I know you have all read, Kennan emphasized the symbiosis between

an ideology that teaches Russians that the outside world is hostile—that is a key element of Russian tradition as he saw it—and Marxism-Leninism, or, more precisely, the Russian adaptation of it. It was a mixture of ideology and what he called, and I quote, “the powerful hand of Russian history that sustains them in this feeling.” This is what led him to advocate this long-term, patient, but firm and vigilant, containment of Russian expansive tendencies as the only way to check the inevitable expansionist drive of Soviet Russia.

Let us turn now to the containment doctrine. Rarely does one idea have such a major resonance on policy. Rarely do policy planners succeed in having such a lasting imprint on American policy. Most policy planners and heads of policy planning do not have that kind of imprint.

Kennan’s idea was so powerful and enduring partly because of the timing. He managed to explain Soviet behavior, to predict their future policies, and to prescribe a policy for the United States at a time when the United States faced the twin challenges of coping with an increasingly truculent Kremlin and a weak and exhausted Western Europe that seemed at risk of falling prey to communism and increased Soviet influence.

Kennan later expressed astonishment that this telegram and the Mr. X article had been elevated to a doctrine. He was quite modest in later years about what he thought he had done. He did later admit that he had failed to make clear, and again we heard this from Jack Matlock, that he was recommending political containment of a political threat, not military containment of a military threat. He also said later on that he had never meant that containment should be a global policy, but that it should really only apply to Western Europe. Hence his criticism of the Truman Doctrine, which he felt was indiscriminately all-encompassing in its scope.

In his memoirs he reiterated that his major concern after the war was that the U.S. had naively made a series of unilateral concessions to the Soviet Union during and after the war that had enabled it to establish its power in Eastern Europe. He was very critical, it would seem, of what had happened after Yalta; and the purpose of his article, he said, was not to perpetuate the status quo, but to show tough resolve and wait until it was possible to discuss with the Russians changing the status quo in a peaceful way. Again, I refer you to an article that John Gaddis pub-

lished in *Foreign Affairs* in July of 1977, where he looks retrospectively at Kennan's views.

With the hindsight of sixty years, we can now say that containment was a successful strategy. Of course, it depends on how you define containment. If we take containment to mean what Kennan intended at the time, which was the need to counter Soviet expansionist intentions in Europe and protect Western Europe from any Soviet takeover, then containment surely succeeded. Soviet power did stop at the Elbe, and the Marshall Plan enabled Western Europe to recover.

I know we have historians in the room, people from the Cold War International History Project, who have done a lot of work in the Soviet archives. But it is my impression that the more we know from the Soviet archives, the more we understand that there were those in the Soviet body politic who did not want to stop at the Elbe. I know there used to be more disagreement about this, but certainly Kennan's ideas are cast in a new light when you look at what we now know from the Soviet archives.

Kennan himself later pointed out on that following Tito's excommunication in 1948 and the Sino-Soviet split, the international communist movement was no longer monolithic, and therefore the need for the kind of containment that he had written about was no longer there. Kennan himself understood that the dialectic of international communism, if we can paraphrase Marx, contained within itself the seeds of its own destruction, as demonstrated by these warring camps divided by ideology and politics.

I do not think you can credit the West for the Sino-Soviet split. Its roots obviously predate the Bolshevik Revolution. It is also fair to say that the West took a long time to recognize the Sino-Soviet split. In 1968 during the presidential campaign, Richard Nixon could still talk about the Sino-Soviet bloc, even though, as we know, once he had won he and his secretary of state were able to take advantage of the split rather skillfully to the benefit of the United States.

What about containment in the third world? Once the Cold War spread from Europe to the periphery with decolonization, it opened up a whole new area for containing Soviet power. The Kremlin did not initially intend to extend Soviet power to places where Russia had never had any influence before, but of course we now know that it was precisely the Soviet over-exten-

sion and imperial over-reach in the third world, culminating in the war in Afghanistan, that hastened the Soviet Union's demise.

If we agree that containment as originally conceived did succeed, I think we can also agree with Kennan that the problem was that the intended follow-up to what he advocated in 1947 never happened. That is to say, having checked Soviet expansion in Europe, he wanted the United States to embark on a series of negotiations with the Soviet Union to deal with their problems. I refer you to John Gaddis' article; maybe the very success of the initial containment policy made that impossible.

I want to say a few words about economic containment, and I thank John Hardt for some of the things he sent me, because I think Kennan had rather strong views on that. Kennan understood very well when he looked at the Soviet economy that it was one of intensive military industrialization, maximum development of armed force, and party dominance of economic policy in management. He realized that the Soviet Union had returned to this unwieldy command economy in full force in 1945, and that it was now extending it to its East European satellites. As we heard, Kennan wanted Marshall Plan assistance to be offered to these countries, but they obviously could not accept it. He believed that the Soviet economic system per se did not represent a threat to Western market economies as long as the Western market economies were healthy—hence the importance of the Marshall Plan. He doubted that the Soviet Union would ever embrace Western market principles as long as the communists were in power.

The economic arm of U.S. containment policy essentially focused on denying the Soviet Union the wherewithal to become a more formidable opponent by restricting its ability to acquire Western technology. At the end of the war, Ambassador Harriman favored offering economic aid to the Soviets. Kennan disagreed. He argued that economic concessions to the Soviet Union would not elicit political concessions. He thought that the Soviets would use U.S. trade in credits to build up their military industrial infrastructure to the detriment of U.S. national security. This was the economic aspect of the political argument that was skeptical of the value of engaging with the Soviets, which Kennan certainly was at that time. He advocated a long-term strategy of economic



denial to the Soviets on security grounds. In 1949 he again criticized some U.S. officials, and I am quoting here, who had the idea “that if you can only lure the Russians into some form of flexible free trade system you will thereby put salt on the feathers of the Russian tail and the bird will appear to be much more tame and amenable.”

These debates kept recurring throughout the period of the Cold War—whether you could use economic incentives to change either Soviet domestic behavior or foreign policy. The original idea of detente as conceived by Nixon and Kissinger was that foreign economic relations and foreign policy should be linked. The Jackson-Vanik Amendment, which, contrary to the Nixon-Kissinger approach, linked domestic political and foreign policy behavior, and which remains on the books today, is another example of linkage strategy, but Kennan himself was skeptical that this kind of linkage would work.

Until the Kennedy era, when we began to export grain to the Soviet Union, economic warfare characterized U.S. policy. I will quote one of George Kennan’s successors as head of Policy Planning, Walt Rostow. He wrote in the early 1960s:

“U.S. trade restrictions have primarily a political impact on the Soviets. They serve as a symbol of U.S. unwillingness to grant the Soviet Union full respectability as an equal in the postwar world order. Trade denial has also come to be an important symbol of our Cold War resolve and purpose, and of our moral disapproval at the USSR.”

Between the Kennedy administration and the collapse of the Soviet Union, U.S. policy combined long-term technology embargos with episodic periods of trade inducements. We can think of grain sales under President Reagan, and the establishment of the first Pepsi Cola factories in the Soviet Union. Of course, our European and Japanese allies became increasingly adverse to economic containment once detente had begun.

I do believe that the strategic embargo did have an impact on Soviet economic development. I think we would all agree that one of the reasons why the Soviet Union collapsed was because of the internal contradictions of its own economic system, hastened, of course, by

the fact that oil prices plummeted under Mikhail Gorbachev. Real problems were intrinsic to the command economy, but certainly the U.S. strategic embargo, something which Kennan did favor at the beginning, forced the Soviets to come to terms with the problems of the command economy.

Let me say a few more words about U.S. foreign policy now, and then I will come back to the question of whether the problem was Russia or communism. As we have already heard from Jack Matlock, Kennan bristled at having to take into account domestic constituents in U.S. foreign policy. He much preferred classic Realpolitik, where you did not have to pay attention to domestic interests. I think it is something that everyone who works in the State Department has to struggle with—and there is a big bureau there now that just deals with the Congress—because we are a democracy and we have these constituents.

Kennan wrote in his memoirs that he disliked “the incurable traits of American statesmanship, including the tendency to make statements and take actions with regard not to their effect on the international scene, but rather to congressional opinion to which these statesmen are anxious to appeal.” For Kennan, having to deal with Congress and having to tailor what one did to Congress really limited the United States’ room to maneuver.

Kennan wrote in a 1976 article in *Foreign Affairs* that he regretted that one of the weaknesses of the U.S. system is “its inability to accept and experience military involvement without being seriously disoriented by it, and without permitting it to distort judgments and questions of policy.” I throw that quote out as we sit in the middle of a debate on Iraq.

He also criticized the tendency of American policy toward Russia to swing from one extreme to the other—either it was love or it was unrequited love, and that unrequited love had turned only too easily to unreasonable hatred. He was also very critical of McCarthyism and the swing from naiveté about the Soviet Union to demonization of the Soviet Union. He later criticized the United States for failing to understand the changes that were happening in the Soviet Union after Stalin died. He said that U.S. policymakers’ views of the Soviet Union were frozen in the Stalinist system long after it had changed.

As he grew older, he grew more dismayed by what he saw happening in the United States, and we may hear about that from some of the other speakers. His view of the Soviet Union became more favorable as his view of the United States became darker. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, he supported a robust U.S. engagement with Russia. He was passionately against NATO enlargement. I just went back and reread his op-ed “A Fateful Error” in the *New York Times*, and he said that NATO enlargement would “inflame the nationalistic anti-Western and militaristic tendencies in Russian opinion.”

One wonders how he would view the current U.S.–Russian relationship today. I think he would have cautioned against exaggerated disappointments after the perhaps exaggerated hopes of the 1990s.

This brings me to my final point, and that is how much of the Soviet system was a product of communist ideology, and how much was it a product of Russian political culture and Russian history. Consequently, another question that one has to then ask is, will these traits endure ten, twenty, or thirty years after the Soviet system itself has faded? We grapple with these questions today as we seek to understand Putin’s Russia and its future trajectory. Underneath the legacy of the Soviet Union lies a millennium of Russian traditions, which Kennan I think very well understood: a patrimonial state with no rule of law, no property rights, and a collectivist view of the relationship of the state to the individual. But what did Kennan have to say about these questions? He certainly had great respect for Russian culture and admiration for the Russian people, as we have said. He understood that Russia’s history, throughout which the state has always had to deal with hostile neighbors while lacking natural frontiers, induced Russian leaders and policymakers to operate with what he called secretiveness, wariness, and deceit in order to survive, and that this was ingrained in the way that Russia viewed the outside world. He argued that the Russians believed that all foreigners were potential enemies. Hence, he said that Russia would continue to cultivate and maintain armed forces on a scale far greater than any visible threat to their security would seem to warrant, and he predicted that that would continue well after the end of the war.

On the other hand, he did recognize, as we have heard from Jack Matlock, the impact that communist ideology had on exacerbating those

tendencies in Russian history towards suspiciousness and confrontation. The hope was once you take the ideology away, some of that secretiveness and suspicion would also diminish.

I think you have to conclude from his writings that part of the U.S. difficulty with Russia is a product of Russian history and culture and tradition, and that some of these things have outlasted the Soviet Union. But, and this is my final point, a large part of the problem in U.S.–Russian relations, as Kennan saw it, lies in Washington.

The final interview that I want to cite is one that George Kennan did with Richard Ullman in *The New York Review of Books* in 1999. He reiterated his criticism that the U.S. had over-personalized relations with Russia, and that the U.S. government should cease its public advocacy of democracy and human rights in Russia and detach itself from domestic affairs. He said we should not be involved in the business of trying to influence what is happening domestically in Russia. In a phrase that I am afraid to say resonates very much in today’s debates, Kennan said: “This whole tendency to see ourselves as the center of political enlightenment and as teachers to a great part of the rest of the world strikes me as unthought-through, vainglorious, and undesirable.” He concluded that “the best thing the United States could do is not to preach but to influence countries by the force of our example.”

To sum this up in one sentence, Kennan would have been very critical of a congressional hearing that is supposed to be held this year in dealing with Russia bearing the working title: “The New Russia: Resurgent, Recalcitrant and Repressive.” There is no question mark there. I think that, rather than sign on to that kind of language, George Kennan would advocate today a long-term, patient, but firm and vigilant engagement with Russia without illusions.

## DISCUSSION

**Question:** Thank you, Jack and Angela, for wonderful presentations. I have a question for Jack. You mentioned Kennan’s growing opposition to the militarization of American foreign policy and his proposals for the neutralization of Germany, which are of course a sort of recurring theme. It seems to me that one weakness in his view of U.S. policy and in his prescriptions concerned an actual policy stemming from our

strategy of containment, and that is building up the institutions of Western Europe—NATO and the EU. You can argue whether so much military buildup was necessary, but certainly NATO as an institution was very important. He never seemed to attach much importance to that side of our policy, which was arguably a necessary condition for the success of containment. In particular, I think the neutralization of Germany in view of German history, when you consider the historical German obsession with being singled out that we all have run into as diplomats, would have been a disaster.

**Matlock:** Yes, I agree. Kennan told me several times when we would meet late in his life that he really resented the fact that his advice on Germany was never really taken. He said: “After all, I know Germany as well as Russia and the Soviet Union, and yet my views on Germany were never given much weight.” At one point he reacted to a mention of Secretary Acheson very vigorously saying, “The man understood nothing” and “he was totally ignorant of European affairs.” I think that reflected his friction with Acheson, or his memory of it.

I agree with your point. I think that a united, neutralized Germany, that might have been negotiable with the Soviet Union, was not going to happen. Stalin was not going to allow that, and I do not think that policy was ever doable.

Second, one of the things I believe Kennan never recognized was that NATO had three purposes. It was put very bluntly by the first Secretary General: to keep the Russians out, to keep the Americans in, and to keep the Germans down. Kennan really did not want the United States to be playing a military role in Europe following World War II, at least not a prominent one. He was against that aspect. I do not think he gave sufficient thought to how Germany might evolve if it was not tied into the NATO alliance; and it was that consideration, by the way, that finally convinced Gorbachev that he should agree that a united Germany could stay in NATO. The argument was that if you do not have at least some American troops in Europe, and if you do not have the restrictions of the NATO alliance, who knows, given Germany’s demonstrated past capacity for growth, what some future generation might do if Germany should go nuclear or whatnot.

Could there be a revival of German aggressiveness, a German attempt to dominate Europe once more? Of course, anyone who knows about World War I and went through World War II is going to worry about those things.

I think Kennan did not give sufficient weight to that prospect. I really believe that if more people in the government had debated these ideas privately with him, he might not have agreed with them, but I think some of his own views would have been moderated. And I think because he was left cut off, first in Stalin’s Russia when he was ambassador, and then by the administration, particularly by [Secretary of State John Foster] Dulles, who as far as Kennan was concerned was even worse than Acheson, he began to develop views which really were more extreme than they needed to be.

But I agree with you that his attitudes towards Germany, in my view, would not have worked.

**Question:** Obviously it is easier to praise George Kennan, and I have done so in print on his centennial. But like any human being, he had his blind spots, and one that has been referred to here is his tendency to see the democratic institutions of the American republic as a weakness, whereas I would say manifestly they are part of our depth, our strength. After all, who won the Cold War?

But I would like to ask the panelists if they wish to address what seems to me to be another one of his blind spots, which were his attitudes toward the world outside of Europe. The policymakers that he worked for in the late 1940s were dealing with global policies. After all, our war had been as much a war of Asia and the Pacific as of Europe. The issues we faced after the war were very much those of Asia and soon to become those of the decolonization of the third world, particularly in the Middle East. The United States faced an enormous number of issues that in Kennan’s writings at the time and in his memoirs played very little role. In fact, when he does comment on the world beyond Europe, it is often in terms which, to put it mildly, are condescending. I wonder if you would comment on his role as a policy advisor to secretaries of state and presidents who had to face a much broader global set of issues, when his own mind-set was, it seems to me, quite Eurocentric.

**Stent:** You are quite right. If you read what he wrote, he thought he would focus on the United States and the Soviet Union and Europe, and he was much less interested in Asia. The time when he was most active as a diplomat was before decolonization. He had a very Eurocentric view of the world, and I think maybe we will hear more about this. I think for him large parts of what we call today the third world were not important and would not become players in the global system. But I also think it is true that if you look at when he was most active in advising presidents, it was before those issues became so important.

**Matlock:** I think he did not feel any great empathy during his brief excursions to these areas. He did not like the heat and so on when he stopped in countries that were tropical. He took some interest in Asian affairs, of course. He was very much against letting [General Douglas] MacArthur cross the 38th Parallel in Korea. But when the tide turned and the Pentagon was panicking and saying we had to pull out of Korea, he made a point of going to Washington, talking to Acheson, and saying that we cannot let this happen. Once we are engaged we cannot simply pull out. He was not one who said we should not use force under any circumstances. I think he did pay some attention to the great power politics in Asia, but he did not take a great interest in the developing world as has been said. The big issues at that time before decolonization were these European and Asian issues.

And you are probably right that he might not have been sympathetic to presidents and others who had to take broader matters into account. But I think that was not the basic problem, because actually up until at least Kennedy, our presidents also did not pay much attention to these areas. You did have Truman's "Point Four Program" [to extend economic aid to poor countries], but that had not been very well vetted at the time and not much came of it. But as a rule, from the end of World War II for a decade or so, the politics were those of Europe and the revolution in China, the occupation of Japan, and the results of World War II. That was a preoccupation not just of Kennan, but I think of our government as a whole.

Kennedy was the first president who began to give a little emphasis to Africa. I was one of

the first young diplomats sent to Africa as decolonization began, and it was very apparent at that time that before then the United States government had paid very little attention to those issues. So this was not just Kennan, it was also the thrust of American policy at the time.

**Comment:** It seems to me that there was a very great difference between the George Kennan of 1946 and certainly by the time of Gorbachev. Most of that period, Kennan was outside of the government but he was very active in public life. The dimension of American foreign policy, which he felt very deeply about at the end of his life, certainly in the last twenty years of his life, was not simply the government—it was the nature of the American polity. He was very deeply engaged, as you all know, in congressional testimony, educating the Congress and the public, engaging the academic world in discussions, and speaking and writing publicly.

I think it is a great mistake to narrow Kennan's vision to his performance in government. The last quote about how the strength of the American polity should be the basis of our foreign policy is something Kennan discussed very strongly at various periods. Remember that George Kennan was in charge of covert action in 1946 for the United States, and he discussed this very deeply in the investigations of the intelligence community in 1975. He spoke to the basis of the dictum that covert action should only be used in extreme circumstances when no other means will do—the so-called "Vance stand." He could change his mind and did. He was remarkable, I think, in understanding that there was a moment of change when he became an active member of an organization called The American Committee on U.S.–Soviet Relations. He said Gorbachev was different, that there was a change going on, and that it was time to make an effort to engage seriously with Russia and break out of the Cold War. I think we should pay more attention to that aspect of Kennan's dimension.

**Comment:** My sixty year retrospective is in a sense a mea culpa. I reviewed my recollection of his words, as many of you have, and remember George Kennan presenting his views to our graduating class at the Russian Institute, and not

accepting them for the fullness of the basic principles that he was enunciating. First, the planned economy had to be dominated by the party as the key decision-making organ. And second, the economy had to be militarized. Now the reason why I go back to those is that he never talked in economic terms.

All during this time period, up to the time you were in Moscow, we made forecasts. The forecasts at the end of the 1980s for the Soviet Union and/or the East European countries said, in effect, if the baseline forecast goes forward then there will be increasing economic problems. The optimistic forecast had to be occasioned by an elimination of the Communist Party, and that was a critical element, and also that militarization had to be reduced from absolute priority. An additional element not mentioned was what Ed Hewitt identified in his forecast, namely the J effect. With the J effect, the Soviet economy would get worse if they did try this. There was a strong continuity in lots of our publications on the economy that dealt with the prospects of reform and change and joining and whatever. But Kennan was right. We should have gone to the fundamental principles of party dominance and militarization. Those elements, and other enduring works, were major contributions of Kennan which we under-utilized.

**Question:** George Kennan came up with a construct for dealing with the greatest threat the United States faced in the 20th century. Since we do not have another George Kennan present today, I am going to ask you to speculate how he would deal with the greatest threat we face in the 21st century, realizing it is a non-state actor, radical Islam.

**John Lewis Gaddis:** I wanted to pick up on the third world question, because I think most people thinking about George Kennan's recommendations with respect to the third world, particularly his first major recommendation from his report on his Latin American trip in 1950, would have said "hopeless, utterly hopeless." It would seem that he had no clue when it came to the third world. I think that is how these recommendations were generally treated in the policy community.

But I would like to make two amendments to that view, because it seems to me that in one area, China, he was extraordinarily shrewd. I

have been going through his War College lectures from 1946 and 1947, and even at that point he anticipated that if the communists came to power in China, it would be much more difficult for the Russians than it would be for us. Now, he never approved of the Chinese, and long after Nixon had gone to China, there was still a profound skepticism on George's part about dealing with the Chinese. But he certainly did foresee the Sino-Soviet split.

The other third world area where he was on target was Vietnam. I do not think he knew much about Vietnam, but he certainly had a sense of the problems that we were getting into there, and he raised the alarm on this in a highly public and effective way ahead of most other people.

**Matlock:** Let me address the question of how Kennan might have considered the threat of terrorism. I gather that is the essence of what you were asking. Of course, we can only speculate in part. He was still with us at 9/11, and I can say that at that time I think he felt that the military action taken in Afghanistan was justified and necessary. He thought that invading Iraq was an utter folly, and that it was a very, very great mistake. I think he would have viewed, and now I am speculating, that terrorism is indeed a threat, but it is something that should be within our capacity to deal with collectively by using essentially police methods, unless you have a very clear situation of training grounds and so on, such as we had in Afghanistan—then you use military action. But to consider it a "war on terror," no—I think he would have found that totally offensive and actually a mischaracterization of what the threat was. He might have in this case minimized the threat, but I think he probably would have pointed out that during the Cold War we contained the Soviet Union when the threat was really that of annihilation, perhaps not only of ourselves, but of civilization, if it got out of hand.

As grievous as any damage that terrorists can do to us, it comes nowhere near that. Of course, the methods of dealing with terrorism cannot be precisely the same as those of dealing with other states. I do not think he would have been in favor of negotiating with the terrorists.

On the other hand, he certainly would have said we should keep lines of communication open with all states, and that we get increasing difficulties if we go in for regime change. Essentially, containment was about not going

for regime change. You contain something until, if it is irrational, it brings itself down. I think that his attitudes are certainly relevant today. I think that he would have approved of very few of the measures that we have taken, particularly those domestically that limit freedom and what we really stand for internationally.

It is quite right that he made a lot of comments on these issues. If we did not deal with them in greater detail, as was pointed out, it was that this particular panel was on his role as a policymaker. In my own writings, I have distinguished his role as a policymaker, as a scholar and historian, and as a public philosopher. They were all three important. They were

interconnected. If I gave short shrift, or we gave short shrift, to some of the public philosophy aspects, it was because that might be treated in another panel.

**Stent:** I really do not have anything to add to that. He was against invading another country and deposing a leader the way it was done in Iraq. To get back to your question, you then have to ask how you contain terrorism, and it obviously requires different instruments than containing the Soviet Union. That is something that should be taken up, and you have to begin a different dialogue than the one we have had up until now.

## Panel 2: George F. Kennan the Scholar

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**David C. Engerman:** I will start with two apologies. First, I apologize in advance because although there were a number of comments in the previous discussion about Kennan's very interesting role as a public intellectual on philosophical matters and on matters of contemporary foreign policy, I am afraid these important details will somewhat fall between the cracks, as Allen Lynch and I see it, in our discussion.

The second apology is that we are not here to discuss the most compelling and controversial aspects of Kennan's career. We are here to talk about his career as a scholar and as a historian—poor cousins, perhaps, at an event like this.

Yet I can think of at least two rebuttals to this last concern that the examination of Kennan as a scholar is of any less significance than examining his diplomatic career. The first is that it is not really true. As Angela Stent noted at the end of her remarks about Kennan's ideas and policies toward Russia, Kennan's views of Russia's past, his love of the Russian music he learned in his undergraduate career at Princeton, and his graduate studies on Russia while with the State Department in Berlin were of central importance. I think his view of the Russian past really shaped his view of foreign policy toward Russia. He went so deep in his view and understanding of the Russian past that it almost went beyond history.

During the one chance I had to meet Ambassador Kennan, I asked him about his ideas about Russia and where they came from. He spoke of *Realien*, using a term from his Berlin professors, by which he meant not just the present reality, but also the literal ground, the topography and geography of national life. He was so deeply rooted in understanding the past to understand the Russian present, and Russian present future, it almost went beyond the historical.

A second reason why I do not think the "Kennan as scholar" topic leaves us as poor cousins here is that he himself would have been really pleased, I think, to see his record as a policymaker and as a scholar treated with equal weight. He recounted with great pride, for instance, that in his final audience with Tito as

ambassador to Yugoslavia, Tito referred to him as a *nauchnik*, as a scholar.

This moment with Tito was an interruption, as we have already heard, from his career as a scholar, which long outlasted his career as a diplomat. More or less from the time he arrived at Princeton in the early 1950s, he maintained his ties to Institute for Advanced Study and worked on a wide variety of historical scholarly projects. I would not say that he was entirely and permanently committed to being only a scholar. I get the sense that every four years, just after a presidential election, he checked his mail with particular nervous anticipation in the hopes of something; and then, usually by February of the following year, he would have a renewed sense of how little the ideas of experienced diplomats mattered in today's world. This was a fairly consistent and bipartisan neglect from about 1956 through 1968, and perhaps to 1972 and beyond. Yet once he dived into his career as a scholar, it was deeply, deeply important to him.

He did have a bit of ambivalence in his career as a historian. In preparing for this talk, I went to look again at some of the papers he left in Princeton. He gave a talk back at his alma mater in 1964 with the portentous title, "The Role of the Teacher of History in Modern Society," and confessed his concern about the life of a scholar: "There was nothing more excruciating," he recalled, "than to sit next to an open window in spring, let us say, and hear birds singing and all the sounds of life pulsating outside and at the same time to try to concentrate on the written record of what obscure people or bodies of people, with whom there is nothing to associate but the name they go by, did long ago." He concluded that there were two kinds of people who became historians: "History is for those who have no personal life at all, like people in prison, or alternatively for those whose personal life outside the hours of reading is so absorbing and so wearing that they are glad to escape into the libraries and archives." We will leave it up for discussion into what category he put himself.

He definitely considered himself a historian. He made what a long-time critic William Appleman Williams called a "pilgrimage to

Clio,” [the Greek muse of history] and this pilgrimage started as soon as he left the Policy Planning Staff. His first book, *American Diplomacy* (1951), worked through some of the history of 20th century diplomacy. His works of the mid-1950s include the best known and, to my mind, the best works of historical scholarship: *Russia Leaves the War* and *Decision to Intervene*; a number of historical articles in journals including *Journal of Modern History*; and a broader book based on lectures given at various universities, including Harvard, published in 1960 under the title *Russia and the West Under Lenin and Stalin*.

After returning from Belgrade in 1963, he took on other historical projects. He wrote a nice paper that he presented at Harvard on Stalin’s work as a police informer in imperial Russia, which I do not think was ever published, and then took on an analysis of Marquis de Custine’s *Russia in 1839*. Finally, in his retirement from retirement, he produced two more books on Franco-Russian-European relations in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, which I think Allen Lynch will talk about in more depth.

One could also count his book *An American Family*, which appeared in 2001. It was more unusual and ranges further from what historians usually do, but it is a deep inquiry into the past.

In looking at and celebrating his broad career, though, I want to call attention to two ironies in Kennan’s contributions to scholarship, and especially to historical scholarship. The first is that even though he wrote these history books as a historian, they were usually treated as the works of a diplomat. This is reflected, among other ways, in his deep ambivalence about attending American Historical Association meetings in the 1960s. (I actually feel no such ambivalence—in fact, I could stay away entirely.) Kennan really wanted to be included among the community of historians, and yet he felt that every time he spoke, his commentary on his historical projects was taken as commentary and criticism on contemporary foreign policy. It took a lot of convincing to get him to be among his fellow historians.

The second irony in Kennan’s career as a scholar is that while he appreciated academia for its solitary work, as we heard in his lecture, “The Role of the History Teacher in Modern Society,” he made some of his most interesting and important contributions to scholarship as an organization man. I will take up these two issues—reception to

Kennan and to his writing, and Kennan’s organizational contributions—in turn.

Even if George Kennan saw himself, especially in the 1950s and beyond, first and foremost as a historian, professional historians were not quite ready to welcome him into our rarified ranks. For instance, his first book, *American Diplomacy*, was reviewed by a diplomatic historian, Dexter Perkins, who lavished praise on the book as beautiful written and undeniably suggestive. Yet, Perkins concluded, “It may be many things, but it is certainly not history.” Perkins distinguished between writing history and writing about the past, and called *American Diplomacy* “criticisms from the land of might have been.” Furthermore, Perkins drew as much attention to the author as to the text, as was the case in most reviews of Kennan’s work in the 1950s and beyond. It starts with acknowledging Kennan, in Perkin’s words, “as one of the most distinguished and disinterested of our professional diplomats.”

This would be a pattern in scholarly responses to Kennan’s writing. They all welcomed his style and his grace. One historian said, “Surely more Americans would read history if only we historians had Kennan’s great ability in writing.” And yet they questioned whether he was truly a historian. Take the previous quote, “if only we historians had Kennan’s great ability in writing.” There is the group of “we historians,” and then there is “Kennan.” This is a common thread running through the reception of Kennan’s significant contributions to scholarship.

When scholars evaluated Kennan’s history, they stressed his diplomatic career perhaps more than he himself would have wanted. Even praise for his scholarship would come with references to his government service. Frederick Barghoorn from Yale, in reviewing *Russia Leaves the War*, praised it as “a diplomat’s diplomatic history.” When *Decision to Intervene* was reviewed by Richard Ullman, who had become a colleague, interlocutor, and friend of Kennan’s, it was not reviewed by itself, but alongside one of Kennan’s works as a public intellectual, *Russia, the Atom and the West*. It was as if what really mattered were Kennan’s views about the Cold War, and his books on Russian history could be read only through that lens.

In his later works, this was a little bit less true. By the time he wrote his book on Marquis de Custine in 1971, the X Article was a generation



old. He had been out of government for eight years with little prospect of returning. He was no longer checking the mail, I think, every four years after the election.

On the other hand, by the time he returned to the profession with his works from the 1970s and 1980s, his ideas seemed increasingly out of step in the profession. The Custine book, for instance, was reviewed in only one major scholarly journal, where it was criticized for being ahistorical. The reviewer wrote that Kennan was looking for Stalin in Old Russia, but ended up finding it in Custine's Russia. By the time he wrote those remarkable diplomatic histories in the 1980s, *The Decline and Fall of Bismarck's European Order* and *The Fateful Alliance*, his approach to diplomatic history was definitely out of the mainstream. In fact, at the time diplomatic history itself it was falling out of mainstream history.

Diplomatic history was under threat by a group of social historians who told history from the bottom up, which really held no place for diplomats. A new generation of scholars of foreign policy, led for instance by the German scholar Hans-Ulrich Wehler, emphasized structures over the individual. While Kennan's version of imperial German foreign policy centered on Bismarck and his circle quite narrowly, Wehler explained it without much reference to Bismarck at all, by emphasizing social and economic structures that created policy imperatives, leaving somewhat unexplained how social imperatives became policy.

Paul Kennedy, in reviewing *Fateful Alliance*, predicted that Kennan's works would be better received outside the academy than within it. I think this was true of just about all of Kennan's work, including *American Diplomacy*, which obviously got very wide attention, and *Soviet-American Relations*, which won major prizes beyond the profession and respectful reviews within it.

This reception I think was in many ways unfortunate and even unfair. In the Russian tradition of *samokritika* [self-criticism], as a historian I can say that even if his work never really changed the way that the field thought about methods or topics, they were definitely within the mainstream of historical understanding. I especially think this is true of his two volumes on Soviet-American relations in the 1950s, which were intricately detailed, focused on the

actions of those, primarily diplomats, in power, and had a kind of implicit realism against which policies were measured. I think this was a common outlook among scholars working in foreign relations in the 1950s—sometimes a very explicit realism; at other times, as in Kennan's work, slightly more implicit.

In the 1950s, when Kennan wrote his best historical works, he was closest to his time in power. The idea that he would return to an ambassadorship or some advisory role were certainly present, and I think it was not just Kennan who hoped for and expected that. But his work was seen as that of a former diplomat writing about the past, rather than the works of a diplomatic historian. To reiterate, when he returned in the 1980s to these historical monographs, he was continuing in a mode of analysis that was undergoing significant criticism. Not surprisingly, Kennan refused to engage in the warfare between historians, and this I think is very much to his credit. On the other hand, it did not help immerse him in the world of professional historians.

Fair or not, I think he was always treated as a diplomat writing diplomatic history, and not indeed as a diplomatic historian or a historian at all. One diplomatic historian, Robert Divine, wrote that Kennan was "unable to transcend the limits of his own career." It is an odd statement, because I am not actually sure to which career of Kennan's Divine is referring. In fact, I think Divine's comment might be more aptly put to those historians who are unable to transcend the limits of professional historical discourse to welcome and embrace works of such interest, such depth, and such literary qualities as Kennan's.

I want to turn to the second irony of Kennan's contributions to scholarship. He prided himself, and was widely seen, as an individual intellect rather than a group leader. We can see this in his reflections on his time in government service. And yet some of his most important contributions to scholarship were not in the form of books or articles. They were contributions to the scholarly enterprise writ large, through organization building. The one that is most familiar to us all, of course, is the Kennan Institute, established in 1974 in honor of George Kennan the Elder, his great uncle. George F. Kennan played a key role in planning and agitating for the Institute, and in promoting and in many cases in helping fund the Kennan

Institute. He held a strong and well-deserved sense of ownership about the Institute through the decades after its founding.

I think the Institute came at a particularly important time in the field of Russian Studies, which was in both a fiscal and intellectual crisis from the late 1960s through the early 1970s. Some of the most important Russian Studies centers, even Harvard's, contemplated closing up shop because they could not support themselves with grants. For the Kennan Institute to come in at that point was important not just for how it helped those who came here and for the scholarship it promoted, but also as a strong vote of confidence from Washington in the center of things. It represented a commitment to a new generation and a new kind of Russian Studies, and I want to acknowledge that as a significant contribution in its own right.

But this was not the first time Kennan had been involved organizationally. Indeed, even while in government he was actively involved in promoting Soviet Studies in the 1940s and 1950s. Sovietologists treated Kennan as something of a saint in this regard. Even those who had known him quite well and intimately, people like Philip Mosely during World War II, treated him as something of a saint in the late 1940s. When I say they treated him like a saint, I mean that they would invoke him and they would occasionally even offer prayers to him, but they did not necessarily follow his ideas or obey him.

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, Harvard was constantly trying to bring him to the university on a permanent basis, on a visiting basis, or for whatever duration and under whatever auspices they could muster. They were willing to have him as a visiting scholar at full professor salary, they noted many times. They wanted to have him as director of the Russian Research Center, as someone who would only work with graduate students and not undergraduates. These efforts continually failed. What was most striking to me is that even though they continually failed, the Harvard faculty was not dissuaded. Even very different generations of Harvard faculty, with very different kinds of concerns and views about Russian Studies, all continued this great effort to bring Kennan to Harvard. I should note that they did succeed in bringing him to Harvard as a university fellow, at what salary it is unclear, in 1966 for the better part of a semester.

Harvard was not the only place trying to attract him. Columbia made a number of efforts as well. What could be called the executive committee of Sovietology in the early years, the so-called Joint Committee on Slavic Studies, tried to recruit him or, in Merle Fainsod's quaint phrase, to co-opt him to join this committee in view of his great experience and interest in the Slavic field and in light of his continuing freedom from official duties.

Kennan's contributions to Soviet Studies were more important than his long twenty-year courtship with Harvard. He was constantly called upon to assist scholars in doing their work, and so in some ways the invocation of a saint may work the other way. I often think of him as a patron saint, or perhaps even just a patron. He was the Sovietologists' man in Washington in the early Cold War. Merle Fainsod tried to spend the summer of 1948 in the Soviet Embassy. At that time it was impossible for American scholars to get into the embassy, and they turned to Kennan for help. Kennan could not actually pull off that one. When Roman Jakobson needed to get U.S. citizenship to protect himself from loyalty concerns, Kennan did succeed in fast tracking the process and making sure that his citizenship came through. When Bill Langer and Everett Gleason were working on their books on World War II in 1949, it was Kennan who helped declassify materials. So he was frequently, if informally, making very important contributions to the scholarly world. He served on advisory committees as well, both classified and non-classified. He served on the Soviet Vulnerability Study, which was a classified CIA-funded project and was split between Harvard and MIT in the early 1950s. A decade later, he served on the visiting committee for Harvard's Department of Slavic Language and Literature. Again, we see this role as an eminence in the field. He went from being counselor for the secretary of state to becoming counselor for the field as a whole.

All of the excitement about having him come to Harvard, and his role working with Soviet Studies, is especially striking given that most Sovietologists had fundamentally different aims than Kennan did. This is particularly expressed most notably in Harvard's approach to Soviet Studies as a celebration of social scientific prowess, and not in terms of the erudition and knowledge of Russian culture.

As Kennan acknowledged, he had no truck with the social sciences in this regard. His main worry here was that the social scientific theories would replace the field:

For people who think as I do [that] the judgment and instinct of a single wise and experienced man, whose knowledge of the world rests on the experience of personal and emotional intellectual participation in the wide cross section of human effort, are something we hope to be more valuable than the most elaborate synthetic structure of demonstrable fact and logical deduction... [We] need not new techniques of inquiry [but] simply people—people with the perception, the experience, the courage, the physical stamina, perhaps even the ruthlessness, to take what is already known and available and wrap it up in the form of action conducive to the interests of our country.

This demonstrates a sharp divide between what the field is doing and the way he sees what it meant to be a Russia expert, and it revealed how in this, as in many other ways, he was out of step with the intellectual orientation of the early Cold War.

But in spite of that distance with the Sovietological mainstream, or perhaps even because of it, Kennan devoted a great deal of time in the early Cold War to working with Russian émigrés. He saw this as something that was worthy of pursuit for three reasons: for intelligence purposes, for intellectual purposes, and essentially for social welfare purposes. The group of Russian émigré scholars was having a hard time sustaining themselves, let alone engaging in work similar to what they had done before. He first tried to do this in the State Department with a program to employ Soviet émigré scholars, which eventually became the Munich Institute, or the Institute for the Study of the History and Institutions of the USSR. It also happened in the major Ford Foundation project that he worked with, which was originally called the Free Russia Fund but eventually received the more neutral name East European Fund. This organization hired Soviet émigrés to write monographs and recollections. These efforts, I think, had much less impact than he had desired.

One of the other things he supported that had a major impact was the Chekhov Publishing House, which produced primarily Russian language books. Many of these books made their way into the Soviet Union, and others primarily served the community of Russian émigrés. For émigrés in the West, Chekhov House produced classics of nineteenth-century Russian literature, as well as works on the United States translated into Russian. But Chekhov Publishing House's real specialty was *tamizdat*—publishing literature not available in the USSR by luminaries including Boris Pasternak and Anna Akhmatova.

He also worked through a group called the Committee for the Promotion of Advanced Slavic Cultural Studies, which again shows that his emphasis was Slavic, not Soviet; it was culture, not social science or society. He promoted this informal organization, and through it promoted a number of publication projects by émigré scholars and by a handful of Americans. In all of these, Kennan was more interested in promoting Slavic culture than in Slavic Studies, and of course this is where Kennan's long-standing and sophisticated appreciation of Russian culture shone most significantly. He also saw Russian culture and especially the Chekhov House as something that would help serve American interests in the Cold War.

I have described two ironies. One is a diplomatic historian who is always seen as a diplomat “hyphen” historian rather than as a real historian. The second is that of an individualist who left his lasting legacy through works of groups and organizations. These are part and parcel of the complexities of Kennan, and are what make him such an interesting figure of the 20th century. He sought to appreciate Russian culture while rejecting its government. He was definitely a man with a scholar's habits, but who consistently refused the scholar's gowns. He was a man highly sought after by scholars for his wisdom, and yet all of his books were treated warily by scholars.

Kennan's contributions to scholarship, and not just through his own work, were deeply marked by his own erudition and his own mind-set. Clearly Sherman Kent, the historian-turned-CIA analyst, was right in recommending Kennan to Harvard with a summation of his recommendation letter: “There is only one Kennan.” Thank you.

**Allen Lynch:** I have tried to organize my comments as if Kennan were the respondent. After all, agreement is necessary on ideas and premises in order to disagree, if we are going to disagree, in an intellectually meaningful way. I am especially humbled by the realization that it is most unlikely that any colloquium of my own scholarship would be organized after my own eventual demise. This is no doubt in confirmation of Kennan's thesis in his third memoir about the incompatibility of menial household labor with truly creative intellectual endeavor.

First, let me spell out some general characteristics of Kennan as a scholar from my standpoint. As has been noted, Kennan made a remarkable transition from civil servant to public intellectual to scholar, and he made signal contributions in all three personae. Indeed, he won two Pulitzer Prizes, one for his history and one for the first volume of his memoirs.

My assignment, to anticipate later questions, was to reflect on Kennan the scholar, and with specific reference to international relations and diplomacy. Kennan's scholarship is characterized by, among other things, a consistently deep and emphatic reading of the sources. He displayed an inspiring commitment to multilingual archival research which is integrated with an impressive, although, it must be said, not always exhaustive, reading of the secondary sources.

Kennan is also a consistent Rankean—one who, as the Germans say, aspires to write history as it really happened. In the process he recreated the *Zeitgeist*—the feel of the times, personalities, and mores in the era under investigation. But Kennan is also a Tolstoyan, not so much because he was always a graceful and powerful writer, which he was, but rather because his histories were driven by individuals scarcely conscious of the powerful sociological forces shaping their choices and leading them, their class, and their nations or their civilizations to crisis and even doom.

His histories are also, as we have already discussed, powerfully informed by concerns of the present, without for the most part being crippling presentist. As David Kaiser wrote at the time, "Kennan's scholarship is infused with a deep preoccupation with man's fate and the future of international politics." Even where that history has been too much forced for pedagogical reasons, which I think is the case with his last history, *A Fateful Alliance*, it nevertheless always

brings us back into an empathetic engagement with the past. Respect for that past on its own terms runs throughout Kennan's scholarship, as befits a proper historian and conservative.

Yet if Kennan wishes to instruct us and, indeed, to warn us of the dangers of power politics in the era of the masses, his masterful portraits of political and diplomatic maneuvering are not always matched by comparable attention to the formative dynamics of a civilization of the masses—economically, socially, culturally, and even politically. Of course, he deplores mass sensibility and the technological modernity that has accompanied and reinforced it. And true, he frequently notes in passing the deleterious effects of nationalism, technological dynamism, and the stupendous effects of the "great transformation" from traditional to urban mass industrial society. Still, Kennan's scholarship tends to assert rather than to analyze these structural elements that impinge upon his chosen histories. This is in a way curious, because Kennan himself implicitly concedes that these larger forces add an element of almost Aristotelian tragedy to his work. The lesson that I think Kennan would have us derive from his first attempt, *American Diplomacy*, is that American errors follow from Americans behaving like Americans.

Still, having said that, I would rather have Kennan as he is than an artificial structural analysis, as noted by Professor Engerman, that tends to reduce politics and diplomacy, not to mention the art of war, to artifacts of socio-economic causes where it does not indeed admit them altogether.

Since I am focusing on Kennan's historical scholarship proper, I am excluding a series of works that involve Kennan primarily as a public intellectual. This, in my judgment, includes *American Diplomacy*, which, although it is by far the best-selling tract on American foreign policy ever written, nevertheless remains a kind of lawyer's brief for certain American approaches towards the external world, rather than a work of historical scholarship in its own right. I am also excluding his memoirs and, I regret to say, even such works as *Democracy and the Student Left*, which is actually one of my favorite books. But these involve his persona as a public intellectual.

What I want to do now is talk about a few of his works in detail as a scholar and a historian properly understood. Those contributions fall into two broad categories—a series of works that came out between 1956 and 1960 on the early

period of Soviet-American relations after the Russian Revolution, as well as *Russia and the West Under Lenin and Stalin*; and then a later set of volumes that came out in the late 1970s and 80s on the sort of antechamber of the collapse of European national order in the quarter century before 1914. I think that it is primarily on his earlier scholarship from the 1950s that Kennan's reputation as a historian properly rests.

From the two volume series *Soviet-American Relations 1917–1920*, the first volume, *Russia Leaves the War*, won the Pulitzer Prize, Bancroft Prize, Paraffin Prize, National Book Award, and others. All those accolades were properly deserved. This was the first serious comprehensive study of the American side of the American-Russian relationship following the Russian Revolution. It is a remarkable and even magisterial accomplishment, owing especially to the extreme fragmentation of efforts on the American side, which becomes part of Kennan's story itself. He underscores the urgent primacy of the military logic of the campaign against Germany in France in shaping American perceptions of and reactions to the Russian Revolution, which contributed mightily to a wide gulf of mutual incomprehension between the Bolsheviks and the Americans. The work is an admirable reconstruction of the human texture of the diplomatic process underscoring, as he writes, the considerable confusion and lack of clarity and consistency on the American side.

In the process, Kennan refutes the myth almost before the fact that the United States was preparing an anti-socialist crusade against revolutionary Russia and demonstrates convincingly that the Soviets would always have chosen for peace so long as the Germans would give it to them. The allies were no more than insurance against ultimate German intransigence. This book remains to this day an outstanding literary accomplishment and a major contribution to historical scholarship.

Moreover, it has survived a generation of revisionist assault, as a recent historiographical essay by Eugene Trani and Donald Davis in their book, *The First Cold War*, makes clear. Indeed, among scholars who still take international politics and diplomacy seriously, Kennan's volume is still regarded as indispensable intellectual socialization for their students, as even a casual perusal of contemporary political science, although not history, reveals.

The second volume, *The Decision to Intervene*, follows on the first volume. Again, Kennan demonstrates that President Wilson tended to act on the Russia question without seeking systematic advice or information, and that American and, more generally, Allied policy was characterized by day-to-day indecision, poor communications, poor intelligence, as well as disunity amongst the allies and even amongst American officialdom in Russia and in Washington itself. His conclusion once again stresses the primacy of military considerations in the initial decision for intervention, as well as the general futility of the intervention itself. That intervention was out of phase, as it turned out, with the actual course of events on the Western front, where by August of 1918 Germany was effectively on the way to defeat and the Allied intervention too late to matter militarily. It aroused anti-Bolshevism, encouraged the advent of the terror and civil war, and served further to antagonize the Bolsheviks without gain.

As with the first volume, this is a valuable and indispensable history reflecting Kennan's impressive dedication to the historian's vocation. Yet as with a fine wine that is best consumed with a fine corresponding meal, this work should be read in correspondence with Richard Ullman's multi-volume history, which stresses the British side, which was by far the most important side of this period of time, as well as Betty Underberger's later histories on the Siberian intervention stressing, as did Lenin by the way at the time, Wilson's realism in using American forces to constrain the Japanese attempt to set up their own hegemonic sphere in Northeast Asia.

We might add to this Kennan's historiographical essay in the *American Historical Review* in 1961 on Soviet histories and interpretations of American policy at this time, which in a way prefigured much of the later revisionist critique that would be launched at him, beginning with William Appleman Williams in 1962. I should also note that more recent Russian historiography has tended to support Kennan's interpretation, as did the very earliest Soviet Marxist historiography of Pokrovsky in the early 1920s.

In the last in this triad of early works, *Russia and the West under Lenin and Stalin*, Kennan reworked some of the material from the earlier volumes for a more general audience and

encompassed the broader panorama of Soviet relations with the Western world until the death of Stalin in 1953. Beyond the early 1920s, secondary rather than primary sources tend to prevail. Much of this work, especially on the earlier period, remains a defensible interpretation of Soviet policy, although, curiously, the Far Eastern sections tend to hold up better now than many of the European sections of his diplomatic history. For example, the chapters on Stalin's China policy in the mid-1920s towards the communists in Shanghai hold up extremely well; as does his insistence on not underestimating the importance of the Japanese factor in Soviet calculations. Recent archival-based history by David Stone, for example, has shown in detail just how the structure, priorities, and pacing of the five-year plans changed following the Japanese intervention in Manchuria in 1931.

Kennan's general conclusion regarding the irreconcilability of Soviet objectives with a stable understanding with either Nazi Germany or the West has not been contradicted by subsequent archival or memoir revelations.

I think it is fair to criticize Kennan on two points of importance. First, he was mistaken in attributing the trigger for Hitler's decision to attack the Soviet Union to aggressive Soviet diplomacy in Berlin in November 1940. He even states that this was the real turning point of World War II. While it is true the operational planning for the planning of Barbarossa took place a month later in December of 1940, the strategic decision to wage war on Russia sooner rather than later was taken by the Nazi leadership in July of 1940. Curiously, Kennan did not seem to have taken into account the available scholarship of Gerhard Weinberger on this point, or, for that matter, *Mein Kampf*.

The second point was discussed in the first panel. At the very end of the book, there emerged an apparent tension and even contradiction between Kennan's analysis of totalitarian diplomacy and his policy conclusions that American relations with Soviet Russia are to be understood in the same league as those of relations with any other state. He even goes so far as to state that the differences between dealing with Soviet Russia and its imperial predecessor, or even by implication with NATO allies like Britain and France (keeping in mind the Suez crisis of 1956) were differences of degree and not

differences of kind. The Cold War was, in effect, not a wholly new and unprecedented situation.

Kennan may have been right on this. I am inclined to think he was wrong, and so, evidently, was Mikhail Gorbachev. But Kennan was in effect asking his readers to take him on faith, given the overwhelming evidence to the contrary that he had just presented in the body of the book. Ironically, it was Kennan himself who in his 1952 article "America and the Russia Future" established the criteria for a normal American relationship with Russia: that it must relinquish totalitarianism, that it must relinquish messianic ideology, and that it must relinquish empire. Yet Kennan was too much the honest scholar to allow his obvious policy preferences to make him a revisionist in the presentation of the historical evidence. In this respect, he was indeed a highly professional historian. In consequence, the evidence sustains the thesis of a predominant revolutionary imperial paradigm that Vladislav Zubok and Constantine Pleshekov developed in the 1990s.

I will now move on to Kennan's book on the decline of the European order in the late 1880s, *The Decline of Bismarck's European Order*, published in 1979. Karl Marx wrote in 1870 during the Prussia-Franco War, "If Alsace and Lorraine are taken, then France will later make war on Germany in conjunction with Russia. It is unnecessary to go into the unholy consequences." Kennan was fascinated by the unholy consequences of the taking of Alsace and Lorraine. Yet rather than a broader study of European diplomatic history, the book is rather a remarkable portrait mainly of late-19th century Russian cabinet politics and diplomacy. Bismarck is given peripheral treatment in the story. Fritz Stern, a friendly reviewer, understood the book to be "*sui generis*, an independently argued history [with the stamp] of the author on every page." Others less charitably called it "diplomatic history with a vengeance." The core of the book, and its contribution to historical scholarship, is undoubtedly the 120-odd pages devoted to the Bulgarian-Russian imbroglio in the middle of the 1880s following Russia's setback at the Congress of Berlin in 1878. In the process, Kennan relates with his customary graceful fluency the fateful tension between two wings of Russian diplomacy: the Asiatic Department of the Foreign Office, driven by expansionist and pan-Slavic tendencies, and the Chancery under

the guidance of Kennan's real political hero, Nicholas de Giers, whose reputation Kennan does much to rehabilitate.

His conclusions on the structural factors leading to Russia's decline and eventual collapse are eloquent and insightful, although curiously he did not note that Soviet Russia was at the time of his writing suffering from a comparable debility.

As to his broader purpose, which was to establish the foundation for the chain of events leading to 1914, here I think the best we can say is that his case is not proven. At heart, the Russian-French factor is too much isolated from the broader European situation, and he concludes the study a full quarter of a century before the onset of the First World War. I think, however, we can happily frame the work as Gordon Wright did at the time as "a remarkably rich and sensitive portrayal of two czars and the men who served them."

The subsequent volume, *The Fateful Alliance: France, Russia and the Coming of the First World War*, will, I fear, be regarded as flawed scholarship. The book retains Kennan's "distinctive individual voice." Fritz Stern again saw it as a series of portraits and morality tales, a "most definitely personal book." Paul Kennedy, while welcoming Kennan's micro historical reconstruction of diplomatic history, nevertheless found his methods "curious and oblique," characterized by a less than exhaustive use of sources, debatable selection of case studies, and historical determinism.

In effect, Kennan wants to make the Franco-Russian military convention of 1894 the master key to understand the road to war and the collapse of European civilization between 1914 and 1918. I am not going to go into all of the evidence here, except to note that, as William Fuller shows throughout the whole 1890s, the Russian general staff took no steps to begin to give actual military life to the implications of that convention. During the Fashoda Incident of 1898, the alliance proved of no help to France. In 1905 it proved of no help to Russia in the war with Japan. In 1908 the French stated that they would not support Russia in connection with the Balkan War, whereas in 1912 they did. In other words, the explanation needs to be located. An earlier Kennan would have, I think, admitted this in the circumstances of the decisions of the actors of the time.

The last point on this is that in the book Kennan understands Germany to be a satisfied power. However true this may be of Germany under Bismarck (remember Moltke in 1879: "Russia has no money and Germany needs no land,") this was less and less true of Wilhelmine Germany. Even Count Lamsdorf, one of Kennan's heroes for opposing the break with Germany in 1890, would, by the early 20th century, be grateful for the French alliance in the face of rising German power and ambitions. There is inexplicably no reference in the works to the vast literature in German and English that the scholarship of both Fritz Fischer and V.R. Berghahn gave rise to beginning in the early 1960s on the sources and nature of German foreign policy ambitions. As a result Kennan's thesis is simply overburdened by its explanatory ambitions. Too much of the book is a morality tale for the Cold War and the "cloud of nuclear danger," as distinct from a work of proper historical scholarship.

In conclusion, having reviewed Kennan's scholarship, I would like to close with some more wholesale observations on reading Kennan as a scholar. We continue to read Kennan, even some of the debatable scholarship, because it gives us endless pause for reflection on man's fate, much in the way that we continue to read Jacob Burckhardt on *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* in spite of an endless progression of monographs in the meantime. This is especially true because in many ways, Kennan was in contemporary American civilization but not of it, and this seems to become more and more the case over time and in direct relationship to his remove from official responsibilities. It has been said in Kennan's defense against the charge that his was an archaic 19th century sensibility, that in fact he was a man of the 18th century. His history, if not his life, tends to sustain this interpretation.

But I am increasingly persuaded that there was something else here, something of the Confucian in Kennan. Consider these remarks from 1954: "I doubt that even for individuals there are any universally applicable standards of morality beyond those obvious rules of prudence, common to most of mankind, that flow from the necessity of the preservation of the family structure and the maintenance of good order in a society."

What, then, is Kennan's Confucian sensibility with respect to diplomacy and international

relations? In my judgment, it includes the following elements: that the sources of international tension are always specific, never general; that nothing is final and friendship, enmity, and values are not absolutes; that international situations are always devoid of exact precedents or parallels; that consequently international relations are inherently unpredictable; that power, while a central fact of international life, should not be confused with a kind of “powerism”—the ability to destroy says nothing in and of itself about the ability to construct and to govern; that, relatedly, every victory is itself a responsibility and that there should be limits to the responsibilities that we should voluntarily agree to assume. Most importantly, and why I continue to teach Kennan to my students:

“We must be gardeners and not mechanics in our approach to world affairs. We must come to think of the development of international life as an organic and not a mechanical process. We must realize that we did not create the forces by which this process operates. We must learn to take these forces for what they are and to induce them to work with us and for us, influencing the environmental stimuli to which they are subjected, but to do this gently and patiently, with understanding and sympathy, not trying to force growth by mechanical means, not tearing the plants up by the roots when they fail to behave as we wish them to. The forces of nature will generally be on the side of him who understands them best and respects them most scrupulously.”

In sum and in ending, Kennan was what one German intelligence officer said of George Patton, that he was a “magnificent anachronism.” Would that there were more like him.

## DISCUSSION

**Ruble:** One of the themes in this panel is a continuation of a theme that came up in the beginning, and that is Kennan’s relationship to the world around him where he is in it, but not of it. I think one can see that in his relationship with the policy community. One can see that from Allen Lynch’s presentation.

In another way, one could see that in some of Kennan’s organizational work and certainly in the relationship of professional historians to Kennan. I wonder if this leads to a broader issue which Allen raised about Kennan’s work giving pause for reflection on man’s fate or on the human condition. Our appreciation of the importance of that reflection is what makes him special as a foreign policy thinker, as a diplomat, and as a historian, and it is that characteristic of Kennan that separates him from so many people around him.

During the 25th anniversary dinner of the Kennan Institute, which was a really remarkable evening, he dominated the event with his charm. It was an incredible performance. He brought the evening to a close by speaking about why Americans should be interested in Russia. It had nothing to do with politics and weaponry; it had to do with the fact that in his mind, Russians had offered tremendous insights on the human condition. It seems to me that is what makes him an anachronism—perhaps a person of the 18th century and not the 19th century. I wonder if you could reflect a bit on that characteristic and draw it out a little bit more.

**Engerman:** Kennan himself said at one point that he was “an exile in time if not in place.” It’s certainly true that some of the most profound commentary about a culture is made by those from outside it, whether geographically or chronologically. Tocqueville’s American journeys are one example. And Kennan is, in a different way, another example—his distance from both Russian and American cultures gave him special insights and perspectives.

I think he also exhibited some sense of nostalgia for times and places which he never knew. I do think his being a man of the 18th century is an apt characterization. His vision of a cultured Russia, if it ever existed in the way he imagined it, no longer existed by the time he was learning about it from Russian émigrés in Riga and in Berlin. I think that adds in some sense to the power of his reflection. It also explains why he was so interested in working with Russian émigrés. The causes for reflection and what they have to offer is a world which he sees as marginalized as time goes by. My only concern is whether that world actually existed in precisely that sense, although it is clear that for many of the Russian émigrés



themselves it did exist. He drew that culture in so deeply that he may have taken on some of their nostalgia, and I think that definitely shaped his view of émigré scholars and of Russian culture more broadly.

**Lynch:** I think Kennan would probably not reply to your question immediately because it would require too much thought. But not being Kennan, I am reminded of a passage in his first memoir where he makes an automobile trip in California. What is interesting is the combination of extreme perspicacity about sociological observation, because he sees in California the imprint of the burgeoning mass consumerist American society fundamentally organized around the automobile. He has this very keen sociological insight which probably derives from the capacity he has as the outsider to establish critical distance. Yet at the same time he is horrified, because he correctly understands that it is also inevitable.

There is always this outsider's sensibility. To some extent, it is a sensibility that unifies him with someone like a Solzhenitsyn. If you recall his Harvard speech from 1976 or '77, Solzhenitsyn was trying to defend a kind of imaginary Western civilization that he saw under assault since the 1960s, or maybe since the arrival of the automobile in mass consumer culture.

It is this insistence on the relativity of values, the relativity of aesthetics, and the relativity of historical circumstances that to me is the unifying field theory for understanding Kennan's sensibility. It makes him less American, but it also makes him more human in that respect.

Again, I continue to teach him not just because of his historiographical contribution, but also because all of his work compels you to come to terms with the historicity of human life, political life, and international life. Anything that helps us to establish critical distance is to be encouraged and is a precious thing in a society which, for all of its other attributes and commendable traits, does not usually work in that direction.

**John Lewis Gaddis:** I have a couple of comments to supplement what Allen Lynch said about Kennan the historian. One thing that has struck me is that he wrote extraordinarily well on historical method as well as history itself. A couple of his essays from the late 1950s and the

early 1960s written just as he was beginning his profession as a historian still hold up as very useful to give to students to describe what it is that historians do. There are a couple of themes that come out of these essays. One, quite characteristically for Kennan, is loneliness—but it is the loneliness of the historian. He talks about the feeling that he had when he first began to do history—a feeling of wandering through a wax museum in which there were these characters delineated in great detail. They actually spoke. They had little comic book balloons above their heads and he could read what they were saying. But they paid no attention to him and he could not ask them questions. He was just stuck with the little comic book balloons, and had to work with those to reconstruct their lives. This image of the loneliness of the historian wandering through the wax museum is very Kennanesque and characteristic of other things and other times that he wrote about.

He was extraordinarily conscientious as a historian, and this is partly because of the criticisms he got for *American Diplomacy*. When he really set to writing what he regarded as serious history, he called in professional historians such as Dick Leopold, Arthur Link, and others to counsel him on how to do history right.

When he won the awards for *Russia Leaves the War*, he gave a couple of talks on it. One of the talks described a scene in which American diplomats are on the train leaving for Helsinki. They cross the border, and at the border there is a bridge over a small stream. There is snow. Kennan describes this scene from 1918 in very close, literary, almost novelistic detail, adding “There was a goat on the hillside.” How did he know this?

“Well,” he said, “I crossed the same bridge in 1946. I know that it snows at that time of the year. I am not absolutely sure that there was a goat there in 1918, but there was a goat there in 1946, and there has always been a goat in every comparable scene or Russian landscape that I have ever seen. Therefore, I felt justified in including the goat.”

**Comment:** I have a couple of comments. One from my own experience is in regards to how George Kennan is viewed in continental Europe, particularly in Germany and in France, where he is often seen as playing a kind of role that is common in those societies but not in

ours—that of the public intellectual. If George Kennan had been French rather than an American, he would have gotten phone calls from the Quai d’Orsay all the time. He would have been invited to lunch at the Elysee by presidents of different political complexions. That would have been normal. In a sense, many of the contradictions that have been addressed here today are contradictions only because he was in the Anglo-American tradition. You do not have this tradition of the public intellectual very much in Britain, and perhaps even less so in this country. But I think if there was a colloquium being held about a German or French George Kennan, or with most any other continental European identity, these would not have been seen as contradictions, and many of his roles as a writer of history would not have been seen as contradictions. I think it is Kennan in the context of America which is important.

The other comment, and this is coming from somebody as a veteran of U.S. government dealing with Russian affairs, is how Kennan once talked about being worried that there were so many specialists on Soviet affairs in the United States and in the government who had read every issue of *Pravda*, but who had never had Russian mud on their shoes or stood in a Russian line. I must say, in my years in the State Department, I found increasingly that internal debates within the U.S. government often divided on precisely that point—had you ever had Russian mud on your shoes? I particularly remember a big conference on civil defense, back when this was a big deal in the very early Reagan years that my boss attended in which there were forty or fifty people in the room. It turned out that my boss was the only person in that room who had ever set foot in the Soviet Union. The way in which people tend to view a society is so much driven by that idea from Kennan’s quote—Cand I wish I could find it so I could cite it correctly. This worry about not having had Russian mud on your shoes was, I think, a critical distinction between how many people in government and out of government then and still do deal with Russia.

**Question:** Regarding the comment that we should be interested in Russia because it teaches us much about human nature—did it mean that the communists, in trying to establish communism in Russia, overlooked human nature and

failed to take it into consideration as they tried to impose it? Would that be a correct explanation of what was said?

**Ruble:** No. This comment was in the context of why one should read Tolstoy and engage in Russian culture. The broader point was that we should engage in Russia, even now that the Soviet Union is gone, because Russians have their own particular understanding of the human condition and we can learn from that. It was very much in that context.

**Comment:** I would agree with that, but I also think that part of the reason for the failure of communism was its lack of trying to understand and take into consideration human nature. That was my point of view.

**Ruble:** Before I give each of the panelists a chance to speak, I want to take issue with what is emerging here of an image of Kennan as this kind of 18th century throwback. He was uncomfortable in the United States, and yet when I think of George Kennan I also think of Milwaukee and the Midwest. I think of an outsider, but as the outsider who comes from middle class background in the Midwest suddenly finding himself in Princeton. It is a very American story, and by lifting him out of the American context, I think we lose something about what he was about as a human being, as a scholar, and as a diplomat.

**Engerman:** On your last point, I think in the memoirs he says that both his interest in going to Princeton and his experience there was shaped by another Midwesterner that went to Princeton, F. Scott Fitzgerald.

In some sense, his discomfort with 20th century America that we have been talking about is evident in many of his writings. That is what accounts for his great strength and understanding the world around us, but it also has some limits. In *An American Family* he recounts the story of the rise of the first industrial loom or something, I do not recall exactly, in 1830, after which the world goes to pot. It has a real sense of tragedy about the modern industrial world—not that it can be halted, but that it leads to a number of things that he finds dissatisfying. I think that also shapes his attitudes towards different individuals or groups of individuals in the

world. We were talking about his ideas about the third world. They were also shaped by a vision of a world order that is closer to the 18th century than to the late 20th century.

This is why he is always such a compelling figure. It is why John's biography of Kennan is far from the first—once you start them, and who doesn't read them, it is really hard to stop. Kennan is just so appealing. What makes him so interesting is also what makes him so accurate and what makes him so frustrating and so distant—it is all of one piece. That is why, among many others, I look forward to the biography which will actually sort out all of these contradictions that so many of us who read his work and study his life have found.

**Lynch:** Blair's point about Kennan's Americanism is correct. What you can pick out from so many of his writings is the pre-urban America and the pre-industrial America. It is this America that he constantly reaches back to, and constantly regrets the passing of, even while recognizing its inevitability when writing in California.

By the way, that is the theme that echoes throughout his *Democracy and the Student Left*. These students were raised in cities. They were cut off from the countryside, from animal husbandry, and from all of the organic byways of life that instill a deep humility and respect for the force of life. That was the sensibility, quite apart from his political analysis. The basic message is these students were, as the French would say, *deracinés* [pseudo intellectuals]; and it has to do with the fact that they were cut off from that mythical 18th century without even realizing it.

I think another point could be made about why we study or should study Russia. Countries facing very different economic, geographical, or international circumstances nevertheless can develop very impressive social, cultural, and even political accomplishments that have to be respected and taken into account in their proper way. That way, you do not risk the hubristic error of simply translating your own experience onto the tableau of the outside world. In the Russian case, it has to be said that this is not just a social and cultural affair. It also includes the fact that in 1945, Soviet troops were in Berlin, and in 1918 German troops had severed Ukraine from Imperial Russia. This makes it even more complicated. Kennan himself recognized that Stalin was a great man. (He also said Hitler was a great man, in a strictly analytical kind of way and in another context.)

Regarding "mud on the boots," I remember a statement that Kennan's boss, Averell Harriman, once made in his later years when I was in my first year in graduate school at Columbia in the late 1970s. It was the same "mud on the boots" routine. He said, "I was there in the war. A whole country, the size of the United States east of the Mississippi River, had been razed to the ground, and within ten years they built up all these cities." A city like Kyiv was built four times as big as it was before. Just knowing that, having been there in the war, seeing the devastation and knowing what it was like afterwards, excluded probably the majority of considerations that were going into the discussion of American national security policy throughout much of the Cold War; and it has to do with boots in the mud.

# Keynote Address

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**John Lewis Gaddis:** This conference so far has focused on Kennan the policymaker and Kennan the scholar, and a lot of interesting things have been said. I take it as my role to connect these aspects of Kennan's life, policy, and scholarship, and perhaps supplement them with some other things—such as to talk about Kennan the man and to take the perspective of biography, of the biography that I have been writing for a very long time. It struck me the other day that I have been George Kennan's biographer longer than most of my students have been on this earth. So it's not surprising that they frequently ask me in a tone that suggests both curiosity and profound skepticism:

"How's it going?"

"When do you think you are going to be finished?"

"Do you need a research assistant?"

There was a particularly humiliating moment this fall at Yale, when my own editor from the Oxford University Press, Susan Ferber, came to speak to some of our Ph.D. students about how to turn their dissertations into books. She was in the middle of this presentation when I walked into the room. She saw me walk in, and without missing a beat she said, "And don't take as long as Professor Gaddis has on George Kennan." The students all nodded their heads somberly.

Why has it taken so long? Part of the reason of course was, as I think most of you know, that this was always meant to be a posthumous biography. Both George and I wanted it this way. I was a little nervous about trying to persuade him of this, but I did not have to be, because as a historian himself he understood that biography cannot be any good if the subject of the biography is looking over the shoulder of the biographer. So that was the way both of us wanted it. It did not occur to either of us, however, when we made this deal in 1981 and George was 77, that he would live to be 101. In his later years, he was graciously apologetic about this delay in the biography, as if somehow his longevity had been some grievous personal failing on his part.

Part of the reason, of course, also involves certain distractions of my own: the writing of other books, the move to Yale, which unexpectedly doubled my teaching load (you would think such a move would constrict your teaching load, but it has not), and the temptation to pontificate in one form or another on current events—a temptation George himself wrestled with constantly and never quite resolved.

I think part of the reason, also, is that I simply have never felt that this biography should be rushed, and there are a couple of reasons for that. First of all, as this conference has demonstrated, it is not as though George Kennan's life, career, and accomplishments are exactly unknown. He did write one of the best autobiographies of the 20th century. Large portions of his papers have been open at Princeton since the early 1970s, and there have already been biographies of his public career by David Mayers, Walter Hixson, and Anders Stephanson; as well as more specialized studies of his career and ideas by such authors as Bart Gellman, Bill Miscamble, Richard Russell, and now David Engerman. There have been chapters on Kennan in various biographies from Walter Isaacson and Evan Thomas, John Harper, and Bruce Kuklick. Later this spring, John Lukacs' brief book, *George Kennan: A Study in Character*, will appear. There is a fine article in a recent *Journal of Diplomatic History* by Joshua Botts, whom I do not even know, which is one of the best brief pieces that I have seen on Kennan anywhere. There are so many other articles—Ph.D. dissertations, M.A. theses, senior essays—that I have long since lost count. It is not as though George Kennan is exactly an unknown figure—that is one reason for not rushing.

Secondly, Kennan's influence on the making of American foreign policy during the Cold War is already well documented. At least, I hope it is well documented, because I spent a good deal of time trying to document it some twenty-five years ago in a book called *Strategies of Containment*, which I have recently updated and revised. I am really not expecting astounding new archival revelations with respect to Kennan

the policymaker. Barring the possibility, of course, that there might have been some kind of a secret taping system in General Marshall's office, but I rather doubt that that was the case.

Third, Kennan's role as a scholar, while it is not as well known as his role as a policymaker, nonetheless is accessible to us, as the last panel indicated. As we also heard, it has for the most part stood the test of time. These books are still read and are still available. So I think there is a legitimate question—what is there left, with all of this, for a biographer to write about in the first place? That is a question I wrestle with quite a lot. I happen to think that there is a lot to write, but I think that what there is does not really lend itself to hasty composition; not that anybody has accused me of that lately.

There are aspects to Kennan that are still to be written about and should be included in this biography along with the more familiar aspects of Kennan's career. Certainly, one aspect is his public advocacy and his role as an agitator. He really was an agitator in many ways in the last half of his life with respect to criticisms of foreign policy, the danger of nuclear weapons, and his concerns about the environment, in which he was a true pioneer going all the way back to the 1940s.

He was also certainly, as has been said here this morning, a public intellectual and a cultural critic, protesting the excesses of an automobile-driven, television-addicted, materialist society. Some of those criticisms, certainly of the automobile, go all the way back to the 1930s. These things need to be put in perspective. There needs to be some sense of how original these were in the context of the times in which they were made. I happen to think they were quite original, so that will be on the agenda for the biography.

There is George's importance as a writer. This is something else that has been said here today by Blair and others, and John Lukacs mentions this as well in his forthcoming book.

In the long run, George is likely to be remembered as much for the elegance of his prose as for the influence of his ideas. He was one of the great American writers of the 20th century. I was thinking about this the other night, and it occurs to me there really ought to be a volume in the Library of America on George Kennan. There are now volumes in this very distinguished series for Jefferson, Lincoln, Francis Parkman (another historian), John Steinbeck, Thornton Wilder, Saul Bellow, and

Edmund Wilson. There is soon to be a volume on Jack Kerouac, and if there can be a volume on Jack Kerouac, it seems to me there ought to be a volume on George Kennan.

George's success as a teacher not formally within the academy needs to be considered in this biography. I asked him once why he did not accept all those offers from Princeton. There were also some offers from Yale along the way as well. As he explained to David, it was really very simple—because he hated grading papers. He could never make distinctions in those days between a C and a C+. Of course, today with grade inflation, he would not have to make such distinctions.

But his success as a teacher outside the academy and as a visitor within the academy, and his success as one of the most compelling speakers and lecturers of our time, is an aspect of his career in which in many respects he followed the example of his famous forebearer, the first George Kennan. I was particularly struck this morning in listening to the comments and questions that were raised about to what extent Kennan was alienated from America. There were some ways in which that was true. But I cannot help but note, in looking in the papers and looking at his lecture notes, how widely he spoke around the country in the 1940s, '50s, and '60s, and how many different kinds of audiences he spoke to and how successfully he connected with those audiences.

You can see this very clearly in the first set of sustained lectures that he did, which were the famous National War College lectures in 1946-47, some of which have been published. Part of the wonderful thing about those transcripts is that they are stenographic, so we have the question and answer periods as well. We can get a sense of what it was actually like to go to a George Kennan lecture, and to hear the students ask questions and hear his response to those questions. The stories are that the auditorium over at the National War College was filled, with people hanging from the rafters. The same is said of the lectures that he used to give at Oxford. There was a quality here of being able to connect with those kinds of audiences which was quite remarkable.

But what I found is that he could connect with other kinds of audiences as well. The State Department would send him around to talk to businessmen in this period, and you can see him

connecting with them. At the farm, he would occasionally go down and talk to the Veterans of Foreign Wars of East Berlin, Pennsylvania, and there are a couple of sets of notes from that. He was trying to persuade them: “Fellows, don’t be taken in by McCarthyism,” and he was connecting with them on their level at that point. There are lectures to Miss Fine’s School at Princeton, telling the young ladies what they need to know about life, with great empathy and sensitivity to who they were and where they were going.

Most interestingly, I came across a lecture just the other day to a group of Princeton undergraduates. This was about 1953, and you would think that George Kennan would be talking to this audience about containment or about American foreign policy or something. No—he was talking to them about sex. He said, “Here is what you need to know,” and they were fascinated, of course. So the ability to adapt to an audience, the ability to be sensitive and to operate on their level, is one of the most remarkable aspects of his career. I think it is something that has been frequently missed by other biographers to date.

Getting back to something that Jack Matlock said earlier this morning, I think that when Kennan did this kind of speaking, he was an extraordinarily effective public advocate. He may not have been able to move the government in the directions that he wanted, but he certainly was successful in helping to move the country to support the Marshall Plan in the late 1940s with the speeches that he gave around the country. He certainly moved the country on Vietnam in 1966 simply by going before the Fulbright Committee and going public with his criticism. I think he later moved the country in the 1970s and in the early 1980s on the nuclear danger issue. So I think he was effective in this regard, and I would simply put it all under the category of “teaching,” which I think probably comes closer to his single most important profession.

I would also want to focus on his contributions in philanthropy—not in the sense of having had much money of his own, but in the skill with which he persuaded others who did have money to part with it in pursuit of good causes like the Kennan Institute.

I would also bring in something that has not been talked about here this morning, and this is his seriousness about philosophy and faith. By

this, I mean the care that he took to work out for himself and then write down so that he could convey to others ways of living and ways of believing. There is some of this in *Around the Cragged Hill*, which he wrote largely in response to Bart Gellman’s critique of his philosophy. I do not think Kennan would have ever considered himself to be a philosopher or a theologian, but he was a consumer of philosophy and theology, and was someone who reflected it back in his own very inimitable way. This was very important to him, it seems to me, and should be included in a biography of him.

Now all of these things fall into the category of the public George Kennan in one way or another, because he either wrote or spoke about these things, even if not much has been written about them as yet. There is, however, another whole side to Kennan, and this is the private or the inner George Kennan. He has given us some pretty vivid glimpses of the inner Kennan in his memoirs and his other writings, particularly in his *Sketches from a Life*, but there is much more to be said. Here I have benefited greatly from something that Annelise Kennan said to both of us. We were both sitting there, George and I, and Annelise, with her characteristic directness and firmness pronounced:

“This biography should not simply be a public biography, because when George sets pen to paper everything is gloom and doom, and that is not George. So this has to go beyond what George sets down on paper. You have to get to know George.”

Both George and I nodded our heads very respectfully at this admonition, and it is certainly true. Because if I had not had the privilege, which was extraordinary, of knowing George and Annelise over a quarter of a century, I would never have picked up his sense of humor, his talent for mimicry, his delight in composing outrageous doggerel. I would not have seen him at his house at Princeton; or the farm in East Berlin, Pennsylvania; or on his boat; or at the summer house in Norway. These are important places for a biographer to have been and to have seen his subject.

Obviously the family, and Joan and Christopher are here today, would have had certain logistical difficulties in hosting all the people who wished to be George’s biographer at all these

places. So it was a great privilege in being able to be at these places and to see these places, and this will be surely reflected in the biography.

I also would not have had the opportunity to interview Annelise herself, as well as George's three older sisters and a large number of his contemporaries like Harriman, Hickerson, Henderson, Nitze, both Bundys, and Isaiah Berlin to get their recollections on record. Most of them are now gone. And I am sure I would not have had access to that portion of the Kennan papers which is not yet open to researchers, as well as to George's diaries which extend all the way back to 1916. Joan sent me that one the other day, the original one he kept as a schoolboy in Milwaukee, recording among other things the visit of President Wilson in a schoolboy's penciled hand. So they go that far back. They extend as far forward, although there are a lot of gaps, as the year 2003.

Among these diaries there is a separate little black book that George handed me one day at the house about five years ago with a slight smile, saying "I guess you wouldn't be interested in this one."

I said, "What is it?"

He said, "It is my diary of dreams." It goes back 70 years and they are recorded with extraordinary vividness and precision. How many other biographers have that to work with?

This brings up another dimension of biography. How do you make the shift from what someone did—that is, their outward behavior as recorded by others—and what is recounted by the subject? How do you make the shift from that to who they were inside—what they thought or felt or loved or feared; in short, who they thought they were or ought to be? It seems to me the line between biography and fiction blurs here, because we so rarely have this kind of documentation of an inner life. You have to wing it. You have to use your imagination. You have to speculate in most cases, but less so in this case because there is so much on George's inner life because of these diaries.

The diaries are quite astonishing. They are intensely personal. They are extraordinarily self-critical. Unusually for someone keeping a diary, he has hardly an instance of self-congratulation anywhere in them. Instead, these record a person who held himself throughout his life to standards he felt he never reached. I know of no parallel for this kind of diary other than one—the lifelong and equally self-critical diary of one of Kennan's great heroes, John Quincy Adams, arguably the most influential American grand strategist of the

19th century.

Can we now credibly claim that George Kennan was the most influential American grand strategist of the 20th century? This has been suggested today around the table. I am not sure myself. I think I will reserve judgment on that until I finish this book, but surely there cannot be more than two or three other people of whom we could make such a claim for the 20th century. I think it is very interesting that these two hugely influential architects of the American role in the world, John Quincy Adams and George F. Kennan, so constantly practiced that habit of self-scrutiny and self-criticism that is so frequently absent from actual American behavior in the world.

Dealing with all of this is not going to be easy. First of all, I am determined to make it a one-volume biography, because I know of very few successful multi-volume biographies that anybody actually reads all the way through. But how do you fit within a single volume somebody who lived more than a century and who had, as has been suggested around this table today, five or six different professions or careers? How do you do it when that person wrote some of the most compelling prose of his age, so that it is painful not to quote great chunks of it, as most of his previous biographers have done and as George himself could not resist doing in his memoirs? I do not know the answers to these questions yet, and I am not sure I will know the answers until I really start sustained writing—and I do not want to start that until I stop learning new things from George's papers, which I am still doing.

But here are a few concluding observations. One is that biography is the most difficult kind of history to write, and the closer I get to doing this the more convinced I am that is the case. I think it is very interesting that George, who was so hyper-critical of himself, never wrote a biography himself, although for decades he wanted to and reproached himself for not doing it. It would have been a biography of Chekhov.

I would also say biography is perhaps better undertaken, and perhaps this is just self-rationalization, toward the end of one's scholarly career after one has accumulated a fair amount of experience in both the writing and teaching of history, as well as, one hopes, certain categories of experience and wisdom. For example, it seems to me very important for a biographer to have the capacity for balance, because biography should be nei-

ther hagiography nor hyper-critical. It must walk the line somewhere in between.

I think a biographer has got to have a sense of patience, because biography, like life, is not a static process. Your view of your subject is often going to change with time, and your subject also changes with time. So not rushing to judgment is very important in writing a biography.

Surely there is a concern for craftsmanship. There are few excuses ever for bad writing, and there are no excuses at all for bad writing when you are writing the life of an extraordinarily great writer.

And finally, it seems to me the biographer must have the ability to empathize—to ask the question of yourself, while not suspending critical judgment, as you are writing: “Had I been in that situation, what would I have done?” Let that be the point of departure for what you actually say.

But of course, biographies should not take so long that the biographer himself grows old and dies before his book comes out. As George, I think, would have said to his War College students back in the 1940s, “that would be a hell of a note.” So, just to be on the safe side, I am shooting for the next three or four years to complete the book. There are no other books on my list waiting to be written; and given the experiences of the past three or four years, I think it probably would be just as well for me to refrain from further commentary on current events. George would surely have agreed with me on that point.

One of my last exchanges with him came when he sent me a couple of interviews that he had done vehemently criticizing the Bush administration’s policy on Iraq. Most unfortunately, just at that point I had published a somewhat ambivalent defense of the Bush administration’s policy in Iraq, so I knew that I had to reciprocate by sending my article back to him. I knew he was not going to like it. I knew I was in for trouble. So I thought I would deflect the criticism by also sending along a particularly good undergraduate student paper on China that I had recently received.

George’s letter came back within about five days. He was 99 at the time. He totally brushed my article aside in a couple of noncommittal lines, but then he added pointedly, and I like to think that he had some fun writing these lines, “Your student has written one of the most perceptive essays of our time.”

## DISCUSSION

**Ruble:** Thank you. We have time for final questions, comments, and observations.

**Engerman:** John, you are talking about him being an effective teacher, and it got me thinking about what Allen Lynch and I have emphasized—alienation. I do believe that both of these traits are true. It strikes me one of the reasons both are true is that while I would not call him patriotic in a conventional sense, he had a very deep belief in the potential of America.

**Gaddis:** Absolutely.

**Engerman:** And what you suggested about Kennan may also be true for his ideas about America’s potential—that he held America to standards that it could never meet.

**Gaddis:** Right.

**Engerman:** In this sense, his alienation is as much with modern society—America as it is, not where he hoped it could go. That was in some sense a disappointment. It actually all comes together. I remember reading in his papers how in about 1954 he was speaking in an Army educational film of some sort, and he wraps up his remarks by saying something that we talked about in other contexts: that the way for America to do best in the world is to improve ourselves. In fact, he used the phrase “that the best thing America could do is to be all that it could be.” I am not saying that was where the advertising slogan came from, but it strikes me that it brings together the education, the alienation, and the deep belief in America that he did feel.

**Gaddis:** This is of course resonant of John Quincy Adams in the famous 1821 Fourth of July address that George loved to quote. George Kennan was mostly highly original, but not on this point. Whenever he got the excuse, he would drag in John Quincy Adams and the 1821 Fourth of July address in which Adams said, “We go not abroad in search of monsters to destroy. We are the champion of liberty everywhere, but only by example.” What was implied in that is the sense of holding yourself and holding your country to the highest of stan-



dards with the expectation that the very act of doing that will move other societies and the rest of the world. It is a very American concept. It is almost a Jeffersonian concept in that way.

The issue comes, it seems to me, when you move from a society like John Quincy Adams', which had no power to do anything else but set an example, to the United States as it is in the 20th century, when it becomes the most powerful nation in the world. That changes then the question of setting an example. When you have unchallenged power, it is a real dilemma because more people will fear your example because of your power; and because you have the power, you will be tempted to use it in pursuit of spreading the example. It seems to me this was the issue that, in many ways, George was wrestling with throughout his career. I am not sure he really ever worked out a completely satisfactory answer to this. But I think it is the central dilemma, and again it has this connection that goes back to this history of American foreign policy and John Quincy Adams.

**Question:** You mentioned his religious beliefs. Could you talk a little bit more about that, and where they sprang from and where they might have wound up as his very long life progressed?

**Gaddis:** My sense is that they are extraordinarily American. Based on his histories of the Kennan family and what he has told me, but never published, about the history of his mother's family, the James family, what you realize is how central faith was to these people back in the 18th and the 19th centuries. It was certainly very important to his father, and George had an ambivalent relationship with his father. Not a close relationship when his father was alive, but a lot of regret after his father died that it had not been a closer relationship. Faith was part of that, it seems to me. I think it is there, but very quietly and not conspicuously.

You can see it expressed elegantly, gracefully, movingly when you go through his papers and you come across a Sunday morning talk to the Men's Bible Study Society at the Princeton First Presbyterian Church. It is an extraordinary theological document. It is not reported how the Men's Bible Study Society received it, because there was no question and answer period, or at least questions and answers were not recorded.

What is extraordinary is the care with which

he put this together. That is another characteristic of his speaking—it does not seem to have made much difference what the audience was. He would prepare equally carefully, and Dorothy Hessman, who was still working for him at this point, would duly type it. We have these transcripts, sometimes hand written notes, and suddenly you realize that this one lecture on a Sunday morning to these men in Princeton is a distilling body of thinking and reflection and faith that has been in his mind all the time. It is really evocative of his forebearers, and you see it all come together in just this one Sunday morning lecture.

There are a few instances like this. If you look at the extraordinary second or third chapter of *Around a Cragged Hill*, which is the first time that he wrote about this in a systematic and public way, you will get a very strong sense of this as well.

**Matlock:** I recall that it must have been around either 1997 or 1998 when I once ran into George as he was coming out of the Institute library. I asked, "George, what are you working on now in the library?" Normally, he worked out of his office or home. He said, "You know, I have been over researching a most remarkable person, Saint Paul. I may even write something about him."

Now I have not seen anything he wrote about Saint Paul. I wondered if you found anything in the papers; but he certainly did do some research on these topics.

**Gaddis:** No. I have not found anything, to my regret. I do remember him talking about that, but so far, I have not found anything that he actually wrote on this. He wrote quite enough, and that is my problem.

**Ruble:** One of the things that all the directors of the Kennan Institute have had in common is the experience receiving various letters from Kennan sometimes expressing disapproval of something that had happened. Until John spoke, I was a little worried that, as we were coming to the end, the main impression of George Kennan emerging from the day was of someone that could be a very stern figure. In truth, if you ever found yourself having done something that he disapproved of, he had a way of making you know it without ever really saying anything. Some of that sternness I think came out today.

But there was another side to him, which I think is probably the best side to bring out at the end and which John was describing. For me, it is contained in the wistful little smile he would get and the twinkle in his eyes when he was bemused by something. Kennan was a man who obviously had a very stern accounting of life, but he was a man who embraced life and found it amusing and even thrilling. I think this goes back to the comment about why one should engage Russian culture. He was a man with a twinkle in the eye even as he would admonish.

Like a lot of people, I want to read the biography because I think he was a remarkable human being who cannot be captured in any simple turn of phrase. One thing I always appreciated ever since I first met him, right after I got out of grad-

uate school, was that he was somebody who always showed me respect—and there is no reason why George Kennan had to do that. I think his combination of sternness and respect and humor and elegance all comes together in a single package. Maybe George Kennan is the only person who could bring all of that together, but I suspect maybe there is another person who will get some of it right as well. So I want to thank you, John, for ending the day.

This has been a special morning for the Kennan Institute, and I hope for all of you. I want to thank you all for coming and participating. Hopefully we at the Kennan Institute will continue George Kennan's legacy in some small way and carry on what he wanted us to do. Thank you all very much.