



Cold War Origins, I

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Cold War Origins, I

Paul Seabury

For American historians the term revisionism (already familiar in a Marxist context), has come to mean the questioning of established interpretations of history and the presentation of new interpretations; it is applied most frequently in the field of foreign policy, where the revisionists are willing to admit the impurity of American motives and the possibility that 'the other side' has a valid case. Today, more than twenty years after the enunciation of the Truman Doctrine, there is a growing body of revisionist literature devoted to a re-examination of the origins and nature of the Cold War, challenging conventional explanations of why it occurred and what it has all been about. One might perhaps say that it is premature revisionism in the sense that no one can say for sure that the Cold War is really 'over'. While the interpretations in these works¹ vary, what gives them a common character is that they place on the United States primary responsibility for beginning the Cold War, and for maintaining or augmenting the tensions between the United States and its principal adversary in that conflict, the Soviet Union.

Published in 1961, Professor D.F. Fleming's *The Cold War and its Origins* takes up the story in 1918, and continues it through 1960. It is his general thesis that the Cold War began in 1918, when western armies intervened on the anti-Soviet side during the Russian Civil War, and that by 1960 the war had been 'lost' by the West.²

¹ Gar Alperovitz, *Atomic Diplomacy: Hiroshima and Potsdam* (New York, 1967); Isaac Deutscher, 'Twenty Years of Cold War,' in *Ironies of History* (London, 1966); David Horowitz, *The Free World Colossus* (New York, 1965); D.F. Fleming, *The Cold War and Its Origins* (New York, 1961).

² Other historical works on the Cold War date its origins quite differently; Desmond Donnelly, for instance, says it actually began in Central Asia in the mid-19th century; Salvador de Madariaga says it began in 1939; an American, Robin Winks, says that 'in one sense' it began on 7 December 1941. Others date its commencement from the day the Tsar was murdered; from the formation of the pro-Soviet Lublin government in Poland in 1945; from Stalin's election

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This enormously provocative study was begun by Professor Fleming more than twenty years ago, when he started to investigate what George Kennan about the same time referred to as 'the sources of Soviet conduct'. For Fleming, however, the problem was more specially defined as the question of why the Russians were 'suspicious' of the West, and of America particularly. His original intention, in his own words, was 'at every stage to present the other side, how it looks to "the enemy"'; but this apparently became intertwined, if not overlaid, with other preoccupations – to demonstrate, for example, how 'we' have 'lost' the war, and also to catalogue a vast collection of obvious, or not-so-obvious, western errors in dealing with Moscow – errors which, cumulatively, made the Soviets suspicious, hostile, and sometimes aggressive. The result is a most curiously asymmetrical work of history, as well as a self-defeating one. Some of Fleming's conclusions are not only unobjectionable; they are self-evident: 'Either we have to learn to live in reasonable amity with them, or we shall all be atomized together' (p. xiv). His work is deliberately conciliatory, but to contrive a picture of historical reality so askew, is to risk perpetuating oversimplifications, and hence to harm the very cause to which Fleming is so fervently committed.

Throughout this long work, there is a consistent thread of unilateral explanation for the origins, ferocity, and outcome of the Cold War. 'From the first it was the West which was on the offensive, not the Soviets' (p. 31). Every subsequent phase of the conflict, as he defines it, owes its regrettable character to some preceding, and usually uncalled-for, American or western action; such actions simply brought out the worst in the Russians, who, nevertheless, in most instances, were moved only by the legitimate desire to defend themselves. Time and again, questionable Soviet actions are explained, and frequently justified, on grounds of Russian national interest.

It is of course possible to construct a plausible picture of Soviet behaviour in world politics on these lines; in fact, it has by now become a well-established procedure. The bias peculiar to Fleming's version is that in his anxiety to demonstrate it, he avoids any serious consideration of other crucial aspects of Soviet doc-

speech in early 1946; from Churchill's subsequent Fulton speech; from the division of Germany in 1945; etc. etc. See my *Rise and Decline of the Cold War* (New York, 1967), pp. 6–13.

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trine and policy which contradict or modify it. While stressing Soviet *Realpolitik*, he is singularly indifferent to the merits of *Realpolitik* as practised by others. This analytic asymmetry prompts him, in instance after instance, to emphasize ideological aspects of anti-Soviet policies and utterances in the West, while virtually ignoring the vast body of Soviet doctrinal literature and the polemical features of Soviet propaganda; he remains studiously indifferent to the claims – legitimate or not – of many states which from time to time have had the misfortune to be the objects of Soviet *Realpolitik*, as Poland had in 1939, and again in 1945.

The catalogue which Fleming compiles of official and semi-official American utterances when the Cold War was at its height is not an attractive one. The details of these are lavish, accurate, and frequently appalling, reminding the reader of the days when some Americans were persuaded that the world would be better off without the Soviet Union, and that whiffs of radioactivity, or something worse, could induce Stalin to capitulate. Nor do the speculations of some American military figures about these matters make particularly pleasant reading. Yet here, too, the strange imbalance of the professor's work is striking; not only does Fleming fail to distinguish between the relative significance of a letter-writer to the *Herald Tribune*, say, and that of General George Marshall.³ For some reason he also almost wholly ignores even official Soviet anti-western and anti-American polemics.⁴

It is Fleming upon whom subsequent revisionists rely when pressing their thesis that the Cold War was generated by western actions which caused Russians to become suspicious and hostile. Mr David Horowitz is a principal follower of this school; while relying heavily on Fleming, he is intent to go considerably further in interpreting the events of the period. Fleming is either reluctant or at a loss to explain why, for forty years, the West exhibited such

³ 'Oh, come on, America! Get tough! Use the threat of the atom bomb while it's still our secret, and the bomb itself if necessary!' *New York Herald Tribune* letter-writer, 4 April 1948, quoted in Fleming, p. 497. This was prompted by the coup in Czechoslovakia.

⁴ *Pravda*, Zhdanov, Lenin, the Comintern, are either not mentioned at all in this work, or mentioned benignly. Yet vast attention is given to the views of American political extremists. This may partly be due to the fact that Fleming makes copious use of the *Nashville Tennessean* and *New York Times* as sources, but uses no original Russian materials.

distaste for many Soviet activities, and went to such lengths to resist its encroachments. But Horowitz – whose book carries through to the 1963 test ban treaty – has no doubts: everything can be explained once it is understood that there is a ‘Unity of America’s Cold War Program’, and that the hidden truth, evident only after the first phase of the Cold War, was that US policy all along had been ‘counter-revolutionary rather than . . . counter-expansionary’ (p. 413). Deterrence thus was a mask hiding more ambitious intentions. More ambitious, in fact, than merely wishing to force total capitulation on the Soviet Union, it sought rather to prevent *any* revolutionary change anywhere. Those who thought otherwise before 1953 (when, for Horowitz, the Soviet Union became quite reasonable in its demands), did so because Stalin’s east European activities ‘lent substance to western propaganda’. Horowitz subscribes to Toynbee’s current line of argumentation that the United States is ‘leader of a world-wide anti-revolutionary movement in defence of vested interests’. This being the case, the megalomaniac intention of American containment *ab initio* was to build up enough military hardware to force a showdown with Russia, and of course with any power defying its fiat; the reason why this showdown never came was that the Soviet Union managed to confound official American estimates of its long-run retaliatory capabilities, and it is this which explains the US-Soviet stand-off after the Cuban missile crisis, not Washington’s firmness, nor the practical conclusion drawn from mutual awareness of common mortality. Still, the old Adam persists, even though presumably America, like Jefferson Davis, has already had its Gettysburg. The principal American aim continues to be to crush every movement making for ‘radical change outside the lines laid down by Washington’ (p. 423). To demonstrate this, he devotes an entire chapter to the subject of ‘Containment into Liberation’, describing the catastrophic crescendo of American advances into North Korea, MacArthur’s ill-starred liberationist adventure which resulted in Chinese intervention and provoked the Truman-MacArthur dispute. The Eisenhower administration in 1953 explicitly agreed to a return to containment, acknowledging the 38th parallel and the *status quo ante* as the basis for a settlement. Yet this fact – that is, the fact that the conflict was actually terminated on terms less than liberationist – is not only not mentioned (the reader is not even informed that the war ended, much less how), but in the next

chapter Mr Horowitz notes that 'it is one of the ironies of this period that while Eisenhower's nomination was a victory for the moderate wing of the Republican party, his election . . . brought the right wing to power' with all its 'Manichean assumptions' (p. 143). General MacArthur would not have been amused.

If Horowitz's central thesis is to be taken seriously, why was it that the American military after 1952 became so infatuated with weaponry whose targets could only be a 'conservative' and 'non-expansionist' Soviet Union, and so neglected counter-insurgency techniques until the early 1960s? If, as he contends, the United States opposed all 'radical change outside the lines laid down by Washington', why was help given at different times to leaders of revolutionary movements like Ben Bella and Sukarno? It would probably be generally agreed today that the pace of political change in the non-western world was sharply accelerated by the competitive dialectic of American and Soviet encouragement of nationalism in these areas after 1945. But not by Mr Horowitz; when he does mention instances of American support for non-capitalist regimes and revolutionary movements, it is simply to show that these are exceptions, or else oblique examples of American imperialism. (His reference to American aid to the British Labour government in 1946 is a footnote to the effect that 'Not even England escaped America's neo-imperialism': the United States offered England a loan whose discriminatory terms brought her 'to her knees' p. 70.) Thus both support for and hostility to social reform movements are explained by American counter-revolutionary policies; it scarcely improves matters that the argument is buttressed by many common sense observations. It is true that the American conventional military build-up after 1950 was greatly in excess of what was required for conventional deterrence, at least in Europe. It is probably correct, too, that Soviet military policies, even at the time of Nato's birth, were not aimed at deliberate and unprovoked aggression in Europe. There is substance in his criticism of Acheson's 'no negotiation before situations of strength' doctrine, which at critical junctures (1953, for instance) blinded his successors to the prospects of fruitful negotiations.

Perhaps the most complicated and controversial of all these revisionist books is Mr Gar Alperovitz's *Atomic Diplomacy*:

Hiroshima and Potsdam. It aroused a good deal of indignation by the implication, which could be read into it, that some 60,000 residents of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were incinerated in order to reinforce President Truman's 'get tough' policy with the Soviets in eastern Europe. (More recently, Mr Alperovitz has advanced the theory that US clandestine negotiations in early 1945 with SS General Wolff about the surrender of German units on the Italian front actually were an early blow in the Cold War, since news of it made Stalin 'suspicious' of American motives.)⁵

Actually, what makes Alperovitz's book interesting, and worthy of serious attention, is its attempt to explore the inner world of American policy counsels during the first crucial months after Roosevelt's death, when the US wartime policy of aiding and conciliating the Soviet Union was being supplanted by a tougher line. Much of what Alperovitz establishes in this regard was known before, but his meticulous use of archival materials gives solid substance to previous impressions, and opens up some new aspects.

Two features of American policy in the early weeks of the Truman Administration are specially interesting in this respect: the sudden hardening of White House views on east European questions in May 1945, as reflected in the crude and abrupt behaviour of the new President in his first encounter with a Russian diplomat (Molotov: 'I have never been talked to like that in all my life.' Truman: 'Carry out your agreements and you won't get talked to like that.');

and the fact that the new President found himself surrounded by advisers nearly unanimous in their opinion that the problems posed by Soviet activities in eastern Europe required a 'showdown'. The central problem at the time was of course Poland. What is especially interesting in this first phase is the exaggerated view held by Truman and others of the weight of

⁵ Alperovitz, review of Allen Dulles' *Secret Surrender*, in the *New York Review of Books*, 8 September 1966. 'Is it not too much to say', he writes, 'that the [Soviet] suspicion arising from these events . . . set in motion the first important hostilities of the Cold War?' Such theorizing could open up bizarre historiographical by-ways: for instance, since the Russians in 1943 actually negotiated unilaterally with General von Paulus at Stalingrad to obtain *their* surrender (with no westerners in attendance), would not this transaction also be equally open to *post-hoc* suspicion and censure? The logic of this new theory would lead to the bleak notion that slaughter should have persisted on all fronts unless preliminary diplomatic contacts with the enemy in all cases could involve on-the-spot participation by all principal allies, who otherwise would become suspicious of each other.

American economic resources as a lever for influencing and modifying Soviet behaviour.

Alperovitz contends, in effect, that from May to mid-August 1945, the hard line adopted by the United States derived from the expectation that possession of a tested and *used* bomb would strengthen US diplomacy in eastern Europe. This would explain why it was that, after an initial harshness towards the Soviet Union in May, Truman – sending the ailing Hopkins on a conciliatory visit to Stalin – backtracked for a time towards a more accommodating position in the late spring of 1945. Playing for time, he says, Truman deferred significant negotiations with Stalin until evidence of the bomb's successful testing was available. Byrnes, Leahy, and other advisers around the President saw in this instrument a force which would make Moscow more reasonable.

It is further Alperovitz's contention that the use of the weapon against Japan – as opposed to a simple demonstration – was not necessary from a military standpoint; and at moments in his tightly argued brief he even obliquely suggests that US policy deliberately prolonged conflict with the Japanese, by blocking peace overtures, so that the bomb could actually be used militarily to demonstrate to the Russians what America actually had.

Can this argument be sustained? Assuming an intention on Truman's part to defer toughness in diplomatic dealings with Russia until clear evidence of the bomb's effect was at hand, why did not Truman act according to his own strategy? He must have known, when agreeing to the timing of Potsdam, that this crucial summit meeting, which would deal with all the major central European questions, would begin and possibly end *before* the first Alamagordo tests; why – if Alperovitz's diagnosis of Truman's motives is correct – was not the conference timing made contingent upon the test timing? Why, even when Truman received word at Potsdam towards the end of the conference of Alamagordo's success, did he merely mumble to Stalin that 'we had a new weapon of unusual destructive force' (a remark to which Stalin, incidentally, replied that he hoped we would make 'good use of it against the Japanese')? Why, when possession of an effective bomb was established, was this then not diplomatically exploited as, according to Alperovitz, Truman and Byrnes intended? By the time of Alamagordo, Potsdam was virtually over; the news of the successful test in fact would seem to have reinforced Truman's desire to bring

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the conference to an end and get back to finish the business with Japan rather than begin it with Russia. 'Atomic diplomacy', if such this was at Potsdam and later, was singularly non-atomic.

But the basic element in Alperovitz's argument is, of course, his contention that the decision to use the bomb on major Japanese targets was determined by strategic objectives in eastern Europe. It is true that in his introduction he says that 'more research and more information are needed to reach a conclusive understanding of why the atomic bomb was used'. He then goes on to say that his own view 'is that presently available evidence shows the atomic bomb was not needed to end the war or to save lives – and *that this was understood by American leaders at the time*'.⁶ In a later passage he seems certain that the bomb was *not* used on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in a calculated effort to influence diplomatic events elsewhere.

Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of the decision to use the bomb is that the President and his senior political advisers do not seem ever to have shared Eisenhower's 'grave misgivings' [about the use of the bomb]. As we have seen, *they simply assumed they would use the bomb*, never really giving serious consideration to not using it (p. 237, my italics).

In fact, this 'simple assumption' turns out to be the same simple assumption which Truman inherited from Roosevelt and his advisers in April. On 25 April, shortly after Roosevelt's death, the Secretary of War came to brief the new President on the new weapon, and for three-quarters of an hour Stimson discussed the atomic bomb with the President. 'It was *assumed* – not decided – that the bomb would be used' (p. 56). As Stimson later wrote: '*At no time from 1941 to 1945 did I ever hear it suggested by the President or any other responsible member of the government that atomic energy should not be used in the war*'.⁷

⁶ Alperovitz, p. 14. Italics mine. The author does not make much of the fact that the Interim Committee, aided by scientists like Oppenheimer, Arthur Compton, E. O. Lawrence, Fermi, and composed of Stimson, Byrnes, Vannevar Bush, Conant, and others, in fact did recommend military use precisely because they felt it was needed. 'We can propose no technical demonstration likely to bring an end to the war,' their report to Truman stated. 'We see no acceptable alternative to direct military use.' Truman, *Memoirs*, I, p. 419. The question here is not whether they were right, but whether they made this judgment – and Alperovitz lamentably ignores it.

⁷ Alperovitz, p. 56. In fact, at the time of Roosevelt's death, it seems to have been already decided by the American military to use the bomb in August –

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Despite these considerations, however, Alperovitz persists in his thesis: 'A combat demonstration was needed to convince the Russians to accept the American plan for a stable peace. And the crucial point of this effort was the need *to force agreement* on the main questions in dispute: the American proposals for central and eastern Europe' (p. 240, my italics).

It seems amply clear, as it has all along, that after April 1945 a new and rather optimistic mood of toughness pervaded Washington; Byrnes and Truman both assumed that possession of the bomb would strengthen America's diplomatic bargaining position. Yet there is very little evidence of atomic sabre-rattling. If Alperovitz wants to be taken seriously, he should have established the fact that there was concerted American pressure for a showdown, in which possession of the bomb played an important part. What his evidence shows, in fact, is that such a showdown did not occur, at least not on European matters, and certainly not in the period under discussion. There was no point at which Moscow's and Washington's plans and counterplans for eastern Europe met, but a showdown was avoided even long after the Paris Conference of 1946 when the east European treaties were signed. The Paris peace negotiations, like those before them, revealed no evidence of atomic diplomacy. The east European question persisted into the dim early days of the Cold War in 1947. The 'American plan', whatever it was, got little support from the bomb.

Atomic Diplomacy recalls an earlier book which, though not concerned with the bomb, was revisionist for its time – Charles Tansill's *Back Door to War* (1952), a short study of President Roosevelt's Far Eastern diplomacy in 1940–1. It was his aim to demonstrate, by implication, that Roosevelt – wishing to involve an isolationist America in the European war against Hitler – manoeuvred the Japanese into attacking the United States in the Pacific, so that European involvement could be obtained against the wishes of American voters. If one took Tansill's and Alperovitz's theses seriously, one might come to the bizarre conclusion that, for American policy-makers, the Far Eastern situation was simply a function of European affairs, and that the Japanese in

which of course is what happened. This decision, adopted *before* Truman's administration, existed in conjunction with Roosevelt's own conciliatory stance *vis-à-vis* the Russians.

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both 1941 and 1945 were victims of covert American intentions on the other side of the globe.

But the record of American diplomacy in 1945 is open to other interpretations; if the use of the bomb is seen not (as Alperovitz retrospectively sees it) as the beginning of the Cold War but as the end of the second World War, a different impression may be derived from the story which Alperovitz's historiography revises. One notes, for instance, the great haste of American policy-makers in that fateful year to consummate victory in the Pacific. The immense fire power of American attacks on Japanese cities before the two bombs fell had already taken a heavier toll of lives than were lost in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. By 1945, virtually no restraints existed on the employment of 'conventional' weapons against targets which contained any military installations. It is easy to say that Japan would have capitulated quickly without the bomb, that American casualties in landings on Japanese shores would have been insignificant, etc. It seems equally plausible that the bomb made it possible for American policy-makers to minimize risks in the Japanese war to a very low level; and (the key point) to end the business quickly. This mood of confident impatience extended to other matters as well, including the outstanding issues of central and eastern Europe. Truman's short-lived truculence in early 1945 was that of a confident, impatient man; but it did not last. The first real 'showdown' in Europe was not to occur in Poland, Czechoslovakia, or any other east European country. It was to occur in Berlin three years later. By then, however, the face of eastern Europe had been transformed, and the West itself was confronted by an aggressive thrust which it could not evade.

Compared with that of Fleming, Horowitz, and Alperovitz, Isaac Deutscher's new revisionism comes like a whiff of fresh air from the steppes. He had no illusions about several essential things – even if, as an old-time Marxist, he had to the end illusions about one very big thing.

Fleming sought to show that the Cold War could have been avoided if the Americans had desisted from their tragic course of making the Russians suspicious of them. Deutscher knew too much to take this seriously: 'from whichever angle you look at it', he wrote, 'the cold war has to some extent been unavoidable'. The tensions underlying the Grand Alliance against Hitler were

'deeper and graver than those that can be found in any wartime coalition'; 'nothing . . . was more natural than the reversal of alliances which our generation witnessed between 1945 and 1950'. In fact, he argued, had this Cold War *not* been fought on the edge of the nuclear abyss, and had the risks been less huge, 'we might not have been able to celebrate the twentieth anniversary of the cease-fire in the relative peace in which we have celebrated it'.⁸

Deutscher's revisionism goes directly into the essential Cold War questions. First, there was the disparity between the extraordinary strength of post-war America, and the devastation and material weakness of the Soviet Union after 1945. Given this disparity, what accounted for the 'irrational' American fear, especially the fear of Russia as a threat to the West? Second, there was the question of Stalin himself – no hero to Mr Deutscher – but a 'Byzantine' who punctiliously honoured his international arrangements and agreements. To Deutscher, the question would be: was Stalin what many Americans then made him out to be, the arch-fiend of a global revolutionary movement?

To both these questions, Deutscher replies that American and western fears of a Russian invasion of Europe were from the beginning simply mistaken. It was not just that Stalin had few resources to accomplish what was feared; in point of fact, with or without them Stalin had no craving for the task. His messianism was a pose concealing counter-revolutionary intentions. His seeming identification with revolution, either in China or the West, was sham. He betrayed authentic western revolutionary groups – the French and Italian communists, for instance – and felt no enthusiasm for the Chinese communist cause. His own purposes were parochial and defensive. 'He was almost as much afraid of the revolutionary turmoil in the world as were the leaders of the West.' Thus 'the notion of a Russian colossus bent on subversion and world domination' was 'unreal'. In these circumstances, says Deutscher, Stalinism in Russia could 'never have succeeded' without 'constant hostile and war-like pressures from without.' 'Our Cold War strategists', he says, helped to cement the Stalinist monolith.

So we are back full circle to the common revisionist thesis – had America, and the West, refrained from postures of hostility to the Stalinist Soviet 'challenge', the challenge would not have existed.

⁸ Deutscher, *Ironies of History*, pp. 147–8.

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Deutscher probes beyond this, of course. Had it not been for the Cold War, conducted by the joint conspiracy of western and Stalinist counter-revolutionaries, the authentic class revolution could have flourished; the ultimate objective of that struggle, a socialist world, is the only thing which can 'cope with the problems of modern society' (p. 162). The implication is clear: end the *Realpolitik* struggle between blocs, so that the world can get back to the really authentic business of history.

It should perhaps be pointed out that these revisionist works are, in fact, the second wave of revisionism which has washed across the terrain of postwar American foreign policy. The first, reaching flood tide in the early 1950s, struck with greater vigour against the dikes of official Washington. Then, of course, the flotsam it carried had been of quite different composition; its targets were the same postwar US policy-makers – plus Roosevelt, of course – Truman, General Marshall, Acheson, and the others. But the charges were quite different: these men had betrayed authentic goals. They had appeased Stalin, not provoked him; they had betrayed important causes by lack of zeal; their policy of containment had permitted brutal regimes to be imposed on Asian and European peoples. The American Administration, excessively tolerant of the Soviet Union, had withheld its force, and the consequence had been that, within barely five years, five hundred million people had been 'handed over' to the communists. The charge then was betrayal, not provocation.⁹

There is a certain resemblance, nevertheless, between the two schools – not simply in the fact that their targets were the same, but in their attribution of responsibility for what had happened. Official America was the principal agency for the 'disaster'. Only in their respective diagnosis of what the disaster actually was, do the two differ. The new revisionism sees the Truman-Acheson-Marshall-Eisenhower clique as fearful, powerful reactionaries, neo-Metternichs. The old one saw them either as liberal soft-heads, 'unwitting agents' of the 'communist cause', or simply as traitors. What is striking in both is their extraordinary exaggeration, both of American power and of the single-minded purposeful-

⁹ This literature, which also would merit reassessment, is far more voluminous than that which is now under review.

ness of Washington's intentions: either to 'sell out' to, or to obliterate, the communist 'camp'.

Both new and old revisionists remind us of the immense material capacities of the United States in the early Cold War years. Quite possibly, it was within the physical capacity of the United States to roll back the 'curtain of tyranny', even perhaps to bring about some kind of political collapse in Russia, in those interesting years of 1946-9. Certainly, as Deutscher pointed out, the Soviet system was in none too healthy a state; the country had suffered immense losses, and large new territories and populations had to be assimilated. Given these circumstances, and a political leadership which by experience and indoctrination was not well disposed to the West, suspicion of western intentions was not unnatural. The question which Professor Fleming set out to answer – namely, why the Soviet leaders were suspicious of the United States – was a real one.

Should it then have been a prime aim of American policy after 1945 to engage in meliorative policies designed to alleviate these suspicions? Should America, as Fleming and Alperovitz (but not Horowitz and Deutscher) implicitly recommend, have done nothing to excite or alarm the Kremlin, even though solicitous behaviour might be seen as evidence of hostile intent? Conceivably, American power could have been used to encourage many post-war Soviet aspirations, even when these clearly were not in harmony with the interests of other states (which are also capable of being suspicious). Conceivably, an explicit Soviet-American condominium might have been fashioned, in the interests of great-power harmony, for both Asia and Europe. The iniquities of Soviet rule over both Russians and others could have been overlooked or tolerated, and the colossal competition called the Cold War avoided. But whether such a course of action was possible for the United States, and whether it would have been supported by Americans, is open to question.

One final point: these authors, concentrating on the problem of American intentions, capabilities, and actions, are not writing histories of the Cold War; they use an abundance – even a superabundance – of first-hand information about the American part in this historic drama. But what about the 'other side'? The Soviet Union has not opened its archives. Stalin did not bequeath a Stalin Library to Tiflis, nor do Molotov's papers, if they exist, stand at

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the disposal of Fulbright scholars. This obvious fact of asymmetrical availability confronts any historian of the Cold War: the conjectural element in diagnoses of Soviet behaviour is vastly greater than it is in any analysis of what American and western leaders thought and did.

But this does not excuse one-sided interpretations of these events. Policy-makers do not live in a two-dimensional world; there were other problems than Soviet-American relations engaging the attention of Washington. In the instance of the theme which engages Alperovitz's attention, there was the war with Japan; the domestic pressures to 'get it over with'; the nature of total war, in which, after five years, the distinction between military and civilian targets had been eroded to the point that nearly every American policy-maker, Roosevelt included, took it for granted that the bomb would be used. (Why not? It was a bomb.) Nor were the Americans singular in this respect.

The history of the Cold War remains to be written.