

The Incredible Shrinking War: The Second World War, Not (Just) the Origins of the Cold War

So what the hell were we fighting for,
such a long, long time ago?

World War II, which never lost its hold on the American public as “entertainment,” experienced a quantum leap in popularity in 1998–99. *Saving Private Ryan* and *The Thin Red Line* played to huge motion picture audiences and won awards, as did the poignant *Life Is Beautiful*. The History Channel seems to live on Second World War film shot by U.S. Army Signal Corps combat photographers. But that popularity is not reflected in our histories. It was, after all, *World War II*, not the “European” War or the “Pacific” War, however useful those designations can sometimes be. Yet, in 1994, historian Mark Stoler, in a historiographical survey of wartime diplomacy, noted a tendency to view the Second World War as merely the “‘seed time’ to the really important years that followed.” Even diplomatic historians were “sharply separating” pre- and post-Pearl Harbor history, in the process leaving World War II either “ignored or subordinated.”¹ That inclination to treat the war as either the conclusion of the First World War or, more commonly, as little more than the origins of the Cold War, has continued and grown among American historians.² Melvyn Leffler’s warning

*Comments and questions at Michael Hogan’s diplomatic history seminar at The Ohio State University prompted me to develop further my ideas and offer them as my contribution at the Callum MacDonald Commemorative Conference, “Global Horizons: U.S. Foreign Policy after World War II,” held at the University of Warwick, 23 May 1998. My thanks to the organizers, and also to the conferees for their advice, particularly Lloyd Gardner of Rutgers University. I am grateful to the Master and fellows of Churchill College, Cambridge, for the Churchill Archive By-fellowship in spring 1998 that provided the quiet time needed to work on this essay. David Reynolds (University of Cambridge), Frank Costigliola (University of Connecticut), and Mark Stoler (University of Vermont), provided invaluable comments on the initial draft, as did Michael Sherry (Northwestern University). Anders Stephanson (Columbia University) read and reread the manuscript, and he and Michael Hogan helped rethink the original. As ever, this has the nihil obstat if not the imprimatur of Charles C. Alexander of Ohio University.

1. Mark A. Stoler, “A Half Century of Conflict: Interpretations of U.S. World War II Diplomacy,” *Diplomatic History* 18 (Summer 1994): 375–403, esp. 401–3.

2. This is less so in Great Britain, at least for the present. The U.K. is, after all, a place where “the last war” means World War II, not Korea or Vietnam. But change is in the wind, particularly

that “writing after the end of the Cold War is not such an advantage . . . if historians forget what the world was like a half-century ago,” applies even more directly to World War II.³

Granted, the Second World War lasted only six years – eight and one-half if you choose to date its beginning with the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War in 1937 (although that confuses an ongoing regional struggle with a global conflict). The Cold War lasted for fifty years. But intensity is also a measure of importance, and the intensity of what was much more a *world* war – that is, a war experienced globally – than any other before or since makes the disappearing Second World War, arguably the only global war in history, a matter of concern. Obviously the events of World War II affected the nature and structure of the confrontation that followed. That said, World War II was much more than merely a connector between the first and second halves of the twentieth century, much more than a link between the collapse of the old order and the creation of that fifty-year combination of frightened stability and war-by-proxy that we call the Cold War. One might argue that “the Second World War generated inevitable Soviet-American conflict, as two nations with entirely different political-economic systems confronted each other on two war-torn continents.”⁴ But it no longer goes without saying that the war was much more than just the generator of that “inevitable Soviet-American conflict.”

I am not quite ready to echo James Field’s take-no-prisoners title for his article about late-nineteenth-century American imperialism, “The Worst Chapter in Almost Any Book,”⁵ but it may not be long before I make that leap. American history texts and the omnipresent surveys of twentieth-century international history and/or U.S. foreign relations treat the 1930s as an era worth examining, even if John Maynard Keynes’s preemptive strike on the Versailles treaty (which, in bizarre and distorted fashion became a Nazi text) has made it difficult for Anglo-American historians to think outside the lines he established. Histories relate the growing threat of an aggressive Nazi Germany and American “isolationism” and mention Japanese expansion in eastern Asia. But once the narrative reaches mid- and late 1941 – the German-Soviet War, the Atlantic

as the British infatuation with Europe continues to grow. Some British scholars and pundits have recently begun to dismiss the “special” Anglo-American relationship as mythology grossly exaggerated by the brief Second World War alliance and, particularly, by the Churchill-Roosevelt relationship. Can dismissal of the unique, intense World War II experience itself be far behind? There is some irony in this, since the agonizing European experience in the two world wars prompted, almost mandated, something like the European Union. The ongoing energy for that institution may have come from economic self-interest and the search for a way to “tame” Germany, but the initial impetus was the compulsion to find a way to avoid another world, or at least Europeanwide, war.

3. Melvyn P. Leffler, “The Cold War: What Do ‘We Now Know?’” *American Historical Review* 114 (April 1999): 523.

4. Arnold A. Offner, “‘Another Such Victory’: President Truman, American Foreign Policy, and the Cold War,” *Diplomatic History* 23 (Spring 1999): 153.

5. James Field, “American Imperialism: The Worst Chapter in Almost Any Book,” *American Historical Review* 83 (June 1978): 644–83.

Conference, and finally the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December – World War II begins to disappear under the icy onslaught of the Cold War.

In one typical history of the United States in the twentieth century, the coming of the Second World War rated an entire chapter, while the war *and* wartime diplomacy were shoehorned together into 12 out of a total of 518 pages. That might have been intellectually valid had the author tried to illustrate the close interaction between political and military strategies but, in fact, the twelve pages were two separate six-page discussions – one on guns and bullets, the other a cursory look at international politics that focused sharply on Soviet-American relations.⁶

We have had early warnings. The current and immediate past editors of *Diplomatic History*, Michael Hogan and George Herring, have both commented about the glut of Cold War essays submitted for publication. My reading of the lists of doctoral dissertations that appear regularly in the *SHAFR Newsletter* and the *Journal of American History* bore out the picture of diminishing interest in the Second World War.⁷ The pages of the spring and summer 1999 issues of *Diplomatic History* offer a striking example of Cold War colonization, with publication of a fascinating roundtable discussion of “The American Century,” the editorial written in 1941 for *Life* magazine by its publisher, Henry Luce. The Second World War, Luce believed, offered the opportunity and leverage that would allow Americans to shoulder their responsibilities as the dominant world power and make the rest of the twentieth century the American Century. Yet that war, which the United States had not yet entered when Luce wrote, is hardly mentioned in the 343 pages of scholarly analysis. A few authors refer to World War II in passing, but the overwhelming focus is the Cold War. No one addressed how, why, or if the Second World War served up or even facilitated the “American Century.”⁸

6. I began to make a chart of American textbook/survey treatments of the Second World War, but however revealing that proved, I found it too boring to write about – so I shall leave the page counts to others, letting this one random example suffice. The text is James T. Patterson, *America in the Twentieth Century* (New York, 1976). This is but one of many similar treatments.

7. See the reports submitted annually to the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations (SHAFR) by Michael Hogan and George Herring, the present and immediate past editor of *Diplomatic History*. Out of 148 presentations scheduled for the 1999 SHAFR annual meeting, nearly half were specifically about the Cold War, and a number of others seemed to touch on Cold War issues. A word about political scientists seems in order here. My impression is that, while some are not bound temporally to the Cold War, most have long ago been colonized by that event. But that makes sense in their case since, by definition, political science, and particularly international relations study, looks to uncover the nature and sources of current international conduct in order to understand and prescribe public policy.

8. “The American Century: A Roundtable (Part I),” *Diplomatic History* 23 (Spring 1999): 157–370, and “The American Century: A Roundtable (Part II),” *ibid.* (Summer 1999): 391–537. I find deep irony in the fact that the most analytical comments about the World War II era are the necessarily brief comments by Gerald Horne, whose “Race From Power” essay (pp. 437–61) dealt with issues of foreign policy and “white supremacy.” Luce’s original editorial, printed on pp. 159–71, was also published with additional material in book form (New York, 1941).

Such preoccupied perspectives are not only understandable, they have an air of inevitability. Contemporary history bewitches diplomatic historians. Frank Ninkovich has warned against the tendency “to treat the Cold War as this *deus ex machina* that explains the emergence of all our major foreign policy institutions.”⁹ Historians writing in the 1990s grew up with the Cold War. It affected what they are and how they got there in a much more palpable way than did World War II. The Cold War exists in their personal historical memories. Of course they think and write about it. Nor is that necessarily benighted or shortsighted.

Some might argue that this shrinking of the Second World War has occurred because historians have already done the important work. It is time to move on. That notion approaches culpable arrogance, for it implies that historians have arrived at the truth and the whole truth. (I recall with distaste stories of a tenure debate at a major university where one negative argument was that there was nothing new to be said about a certain wartime American president.) History should be based on as much evidence as can be collected and weighed, but perspectives constantly change and generate new insights. Conventional wisdom is rarely wise. Moreover, rumors to the contrary notwithstanding, the Soviet-era archives are *not* open to research, at least not in any scholarly sense of the word. We still do not have a clear understanding of the perceptions Stalin and his advisers had of British and American policies and actions during World War II. The fascinating bits and pieces that keep appearing have whetted our appetites, but only full and free access to the documentary record will satisfy.¹⁰

There are a few signs of life. Studies of the reactions of American soldiers to the Europeans they met during the war offer new ways to understand the struggle between internationalism and unilateralism. Gender and international history is being studied in a Second World War context, as are questions of historical memory. The Holocaust has finally emerged from its own Cold War cocoon after lying nearly hidden from view, or at least from American awareness, for decades – an invisibility prompted in part by Western alliance politics requiring that Germans be “good,” awkward if the U.S. government were pursuing Nazi war crimes and criminals.¹¹ Such studies, in Michael Sherry’s words, “transcend the World War II/Cold War divide and are thus not

9. Frank Ninkovich, “The United States, NATO, and the Lessons of History” (unpublished paper delivered at the Baker Peace Conference – The European Union, Ohio University, 13 February 1999), p. 5.

10. The Cold War International History Project, sponsored by the Wilson Center in Washington, DC, has done yeoman work in this regard, but its efforts have not brought about systematic, full access to Soviet-era records.

11. See Donald G. Schilling, “Re-presenting the Holocaust in the General Histories of World War II” (presented at the conference *Lessons and Legacies V: Law Evidence and Context*, Florida Atlantic University, Boca Raton, Florida, November 1998).

submerged on either side. [In those cases it is] perhaps best to think of WW2 as being ‘re-imagined.’”¹²

That said, can U.S. foreign policy and diplomacy be understood exclusively through the prism of the Cold War? Put that way, “of course not” is the obvious answer. But all too often that is what happens. The overly tight focus of historians on the Cold War as the “main event” since 1945 has already distorted our image of the postwar era and, if the Cold War continues to colonize World War II, that distortion will spread.

That myopia has already affected the history of World War II. To illustrate: the *politics* of the Italian surrender, an event that qualifies as both liberation and occupation, is already routinely treated as little more than an early chapter in the Cold War. Granted, the Allied Control Council for Italy is properly seen as a device to exclude the Soviet Union from any effective role in “liberated” Italy, but the reconstruction of Italian political and economic institutions during the war, Anglo-American-Italian maneuverings around that reconstruction, and the Churchill and Roosevelt dispute over who should be the “senior partner” cannot be understood within the isolation of Soviet-Western differences.¹³

A good deal of this Cold War colonization of history came about because so many of the scholars writing about the Second World War were, in fact, fighting the Cold War by proxy – that latter war’s favorite form. Herbert Feis, in his early study, *Churchill, Roosevelt, Stalin*, focused on the politics of Soviet-Western confrontation, despite his own expertise and interest in international economics. When Gabriel Kolko depicted *The Politics of War* as little more than an all-out offensive by liberal capitalism against the “Left,” he trivialized World War II to the point of caricature. A number of Roosevelt admirers, like Arthur Schlesinger and Robert Dallek, have advanced the colonialization process by making FDR into an early Cold Warrior.¹⁴ Then, with the collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s, came a new wave of Cold Warrior historians, the new “perfectionists” who, painting their passions on a canvas bereft of perspective, insisted that Churchill and Roosevelt “sold out” eastern Europe to the Kremlin. Soviet satellites in Europe could have been saved from Moscow’s domination, they argue, had Roosevelt and Churchill only tried. William Hardy McNeill, writing just a few years after the war, achieved better balance, finding wartime

12. Two studies of American GIs in Europe are David Reynolds, *Rich Relations: The American Occupation of Britain, 1942–1945* (New York, 1995), and Peter Schrijvers, *The Crash of Ruin: American Combat Soldiers in Europe during World War II* (New York, 1998). Michael Sherry is quoted from personal correspondence to the author, 9 December 1998.

13. Warren F. Kimball, *Forged in War: Roosevelt, Churchill and the Second World War* (New York, 1997), 209.

14. Gabriel Kolko, *The Politics of War* (New York, 1968); Herbert Feis, *Churchill, Roosevelt, Stalin: The War They Waged and the Peace They Sought* (Princeton, 1957); Arthur S. Schlesinger, Jr., “Roosevelt’s Diplomacy at Yalta,” in *Yalta: Un Mito che Resiste*, ed. Paola Brundu Olla (Roma, n.d. [1987]), 137–58; Robert Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy, 1932–1945: With a New Afterword* (New York, 1995).

cooperation and conflict an Anglo-American-Soviet three-way street, a perspective perhaps made easier because he wrote *before* Churchill published his misleading but seductive memoir-called-history, confidently titled *The Second World War*.¹⁵

This is not an argument about periodization. Perhaps the Cold War began in 1917, as some insist. Or perhaps there were two cold wars, one from 1917 through 1941 or 1945, and one thereafter until 1991. Perhaps more. But however many cold wars there were, such formulations beg the question and obscure the place in history of the Second World War.

Moreover, what was the Cold War, a key question if we are to understand the Second World War as more than “just the origins of the Cold War.” The popular, most common usage makes it an era, a vague description for the entire period from 1945 to 1991. Historians are always eager to lump history into periods that fit their research and teaching needs. “Era” seems to be the favorite fudge word – vague enough to exclude what you do not want to address, specific enough to include what you are interested in. (I am already guilty of that sin in this essay.) For historians of the Cold War “era,” particularly Americans, it is increasingly comfortable and convenient to lump the Second World War into their opening lecture or first textbook chapter.

For argument’s sake, and as an international-diplomatic historian of the recent past, I would define the Cold War more tightly, and in aggressive, expansionist terms. The American (Western?) “war aim” for the Cold War was the collapse and destruction of the Soviet state and system and its displacement by liberal democratic institutions, whatever the rhetoric about coexistence. Debates among Cold Warriors over policy were about methods, not goals. Certainly the collapse of Soviet communism is what “containment” aimed at, whether that containment was moral and political – à la Kennan, or military – as with NATO, NSC-68, and Star Wars.

But is that what Roosevelt, or even Churchill, tried to accomplish during World War II? Hardly! How is Roosevelt’s foreign policy toward the Soviet

15. The most strident of the new perfectionists is R. C. Raack, *Stalin's Drive to the West, 1938–1945* (Stanford, 1995). Other examples are Remi Nadeau, *Stalin, Churchill, and Roosevelt Divide Europe* (Westport, 1990); Elena Aga-Rossi, “Roosevelt’s European Policy and the Origins of the Cold War: A Reevaluation,” *Telos* 96 (Summer 1993): 65–85; and the essay by Norman Davies, *New York Review of Books*, 25 May 1995. Schlesinger used the phrase “perfectionist clamor” to describe critics of FDR’s Yalta negotiations in “Roosevelt’s Diplomacy at Yalta,” 146, 152. For my strong disagreement with the claim that FDR became a Cold Warrior before his death see *The Juggler: Franklin Roosevelt as Wartime Statesman* (Princeton, 1991), chaps. 8–9. See also idem, “Churchill, Roosevelt and Post-war Europe,” in *Winston Churchill: Studies in Statesmanship*, ed. R. A. C. Parker (London, 1995), 135–49. For a curious “perfectionist” attack on Churchill’s policies in 1940 see Bernd Martin, “Churchill and Hitler, 1940: Peace or War?” in *ibid.*, 83–96. William H. McNeill, *America, Britain, & Russia: Their Co-operation and Conflict, 1941–1946* (1953; New York & London, 1970); Winston S. Churchill, *The Second World War*, 6 vols. (Boston, 1948–53). On the influence of that memoir see W. F. Kimball, “Wheel Within a Wheel: Churchill, Roosevelt, and the Special Relationship,” in *Churchill*, ed. Robert Blake and Wm. Roger Louis (Oxford, 1993), 291–307. The impact of Churchill’s wartime memoir on history and historians cries out for full and careful analysis.

Union in those years one of the *origins* of the Cold War? FDR's musings about a moderating of the Soviet system became an object of scorn early in the Cold War and remain so, for some, even fifty years after his death.¹⁶ But, however flawed and perhaps naive (the word does not fit FDR) Roosevelt's policies may have been, they were not, in any sense, aimed at the destruction of the Soviet state/system or even at "containment" of the threat posed by both communism and the USSR. Yes, FDR assumed that American-style liberal capitalism would prevail, but ideological leaders from the beginning of time have so assumed. Popes assumed that their Church would prevail; Hitler presumed that Aryan racism would prevail; Stalin presumed that communism would prevail. What matters is not the assumption, but if and how leaders tried to make that assumption come true. Did FDR try to foster the growth of American-style liberal capitalism? Yes. Did he do so in the way medieval popes, Stalin, or Hitler tried to realize their goals? Not at all!

Even Churchill did not follow policies aimed at destroying the Soviet state, however ambivalent and inconsistent he was about whether cooperation, confrontation, or cutting a spheres-of-influence deal was the best way to cope with Stalin.¹⁷ Churchill and Roosevelt hoped to prevent the USSR from becoming the dominant European power but, during World War II, Roosevelt – and Churchill much of the time – abjured the goals of both Woodrow Wilson¹⁸ and those of the liberal and conservative "cold warriors" (little difference between the two) – namely, the destruction of the Soviet Union. Perhaps Churchill's live-and-let-live approach was dictated by his geopolitical "realism," whereas FDR's stemmed from a casual, optimistic dismissal of ideology. But the end result was that the Second World War, in terms of Anglo-American policies, was not merely the origins of the Cold War, though it may have been the last good chance to make the Soviet-Western confrontation something less than that.

What then was World War II, beyond the important but not solitary issue of the origins of the Cold War?¹⁹

16. See, for example, Dennis Dunn, *Caught between Roosevelt and Stalin: America's Ambassadors to Moscow* (Lexington, KY, 1998), which epitomizes the passion, contempt, and ahistorical anger of the "new perfectionists."

17. For a neat summary of Churchill's ambivalent views of the Soviet Union (Russia) see David Carlton, *Churchill and the Soviet Union* (Manchester, England, 2000).

18. For those with doubts about Wilson's abiding hostility to Bolshevik rule in Russia see David S. Foglesong, *America's Secret War against Bolshevism: U.S. Intervention in the Russian Civil War, 1917–1920* (Chapel Hill, 1995).

19. I can only allude to much of the history that can be understood only within the experience of the Second World War. I also confess to the sin of parochialism, for I am here concerned about the proper historical place of World War II for the history of the United States, not for the entire world – though the British creep into most everything I do. Moreover, the Second World War means very different things to different societies. For the Russians it truly was and remains "The Great Patriotic War"; for the French issues of occupation and collaboration make it a different war; and so on. That global task is one Gerhard Weinberg has begun with both his massive work, *A World at Arms: A Global History of World War II* (Cambridge, England, 1994), and his useful essay, "The Place of World War II in History," Harmon Memorial Lectures in Military History, number

We must all confront the intellectual and ethical issues raised by the war – witness, for example, the difficulty of reconciling or even facing up to the planned inhumanity of the Holocaust. “It is a matter of macabre semantics,” George Steiner has written, “offensive to reason, to try and determine whether or not, and in what ways . . . the Holocaust is unique; whether or not it defines a singularity in the history of mankind.” Whatever one’s reaction to that statement, the dilemma of the Jew in the Christian West serves as metaphor for the growing worldwide crisis of humanism in its struggle with organized civilization – a *growing* crisis as the technology of the twentieth century has expanded exponentially the monstrous capabilities of modern “civilized” societies to brutalize while increasing the reach of those societies (governments) in exercising that brutality. Again quoting Steiner: “Conservative estimates put at circa 75 million the total of men, women, and children gunned, bombed, gassed, starved to death, slaughtered during deportations, slave-labor, and famines between 1914 and the close of the Gulag (roughly nine million perished amid cannibalism and suicide during Stalin’s elimination of the Kulaks in the Ukraine). Five British infantrymen died every fifty seconds during the first days on the Somme.”²⁰ And so on ad nauseam, ad horribilis.

But whatever the importance of the Holocaust-as-metaphor, it was a specific historical episode during a specific historical event – the Second World War. Holocaust studies should not have lost touch with that historical anchor,²¹ and seem to be trying to regain contact, but the full scope of the incredible, even revolutionary, technological and scientific changes stimulated, accelerated, and even created by the requirements of the war – the atomic bomb being just one

38 (U.S. Air Force Academy, CO, 1995), but that is only a start. Because the United States finally embraced (perhaps too tightly for some) the world during the war, my Americentric perspective is international, but it still limits my view.

20. For what is only the latest in Steiner’s musings on these matters see his *Errata* (New Haven, 1997), esp. 115–35. The quotations are from p. 118.

21. For examples of Holocaust studies that include but go beyond either a Cold War or a limited WWII connection see the works of Omer Bartov, particularly *Mirrors of Destruction: War, Genocide, and Modern Identity* (New York, forthcoming). Holocaust studies since the 1980s has pried open a substantial body of new archival material and generated a number of analytical studies. See, for example, William Slany, *U.S. and Allied Efforts to Recover and Restore Gold and Other Assets Stolen or Hidden by Germany during World War II: Preliminary Study* (Washington, 1997); idem, *U.S. and Allied Wartime and Postwar Relations and Negotiations with Argentina, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, and Turkey on Looted Gold and German External Assets and U.S. Concerns about the Fate of the Wartime Ustasha Treasury* (Washington, 1998); and Richard Breitman, *Official Secrets: What the Nazis Planned, What the British and Americans Knew* (New York, 1998). See also Weinberg, *A World at Arms*. The recent study by Arieh J. Kochavi, *Prelude to Nuremberg: Allied War Crimes Policy and the Question of Punishment* (Chapel Hill, 1998), treats war crimes largely in isolation.

Then there is the danger of too much success. Studying the Holocaust as a specific historical event may have blinded politicians and the public to other, Holocaust-as-metaphor, issues. The Nazi War Crimes Disclosure Act of 1998 (better called the Holtzman Act, after its most persistent advocate, Elizabeth Holtzman) has generated a debate as to whether or not the law even allows commission members to investigate Japanese war crimes (for example, medical experimentation, which the Japanese conducted on a larger scale than the Germans).

of them – need continued dissection and analysis beyond how they affected the Cold War dynamic.²²

The Second World War stimulated and perhaps created significant, even dramatic, political and social changes in societies everywhere. The war unleashed transforming domestic forces in the United States, Britain, and throughout the world.²³ That is most evident in a comparison of pre- and postwar German society and the Japanese political economy.

In the United States, the national economy became bound up with military spending – a legacy of the Second World War that was *continued during* rather than begun in the Cold War.²⁴ The military-industrial-educational complex that Dwight Eisenhower as president publicized (perhaps to his own regret) was created during World War II – not in order to confront the Soviet Union, but to defeat Germany and Japan. That phenomenon is as significant a change in the American political economy as those generated by industrialization and urbanization.

There were accompanying changes in U.S. government attitudes, and in attitudes toward that government. Even while mobilization created bigger government, fear of socialism and the New Deal, the same thing in the minds of many, began to move the nation (back?) toward suspicion of “big” government. As one friend indignantly pointed out, there was the imposition of the withholding tax, “premised on the idea that income-earners need not ever see a substantial portion of what they earned.” As aggravating as that may be to the earner, even more important is the arrogance of a government that assumes it owns in advance the taxes it imposes. The Second World War also generated in the United States the “consensus” interpretation of history, which emphasized agreement and compromise in the development of the American nation, downplaying and even dismissing conflict. Whatever the role that piece of historiography played in cobbling together a Cold War consensus, the triumphalism of World War II and the economic growth that began with the aid-to-Britain program in 1940 combined to make the American Century seem at hand, at home and abroad.

That economic growth also meant the end of the Great Depression – the most immediate effect of the Second World War, at least for the United States. Americans would leave World War II anticipating that the specter of depression would reappear, but that never happened, whatever small bumps and relatively short economic recessions came in the last half of the twentieth century. Keynesian spending for military purposes, whether during the Second World

22. Gar Alperowitz’s career-long preoccupation with atomic “diplomacy” tends to obscure the connection between the bomb and the Second World War; *The Decision to Use the Atomic Bomb* (New York, 1995).

23. For overviews see the essays on “the home front” in *Allies at War: The American, British, and Soviet Experience in the Second World War*, ed. D. Reynolds, W. F. Kimball, A. O. Chubarian (New York, 1994).

24. See Michael Sherry, *In the Shadow of War: The United States since the 1930s* (New Haven, 1995).

War or after, became a permanent feature of the American economic and political landscape, regardless of which political party was in power.

Covert action by forces euphemistically mislabeled “intelligence,” though hardly a tactic invented in World War II, became an accepted means of implementing U.S. foreign policy. After all, the enemies were evil. OSS (Office of Strategic Services – the Second World War covert action agency) involvement with, for example, Tito in Yugoslavia and Ho Chi Minh in Vietnam – each of which turned out differently – was as much for political as military reasons. Those and similar covert activities set a precedent that became uncomfortably routine during the Cold War, bringing home the deeper meaning of Henry Stimson’s remark that “gentlemen do not read other people’s mail.” In fact, it may have been the British who set the stage. Some recent, and recently declassified, research suggests that British covert operations in the United States, conducted with the connivance of the Roosevelt administration, may have played a meaningful role in moving the Americans into active participation in the war.²⁵

Military historians have all too often brought on dismissals of their work as focused on the trivial. Unhappily, too much military history is flagless and stateless. Battles are fought by interchangeable forces, with victory rigidly determined by tanks and tactics as if in a computer simulation. That an army is German or American or Chinese seems irrelevant.²⁶ As Stephen Ambrose

25. OSS engaged in both clandestine intelligence collection and special operations (guerrilla, sabotage, and subversion activities). U.S. special operations in the Second World War await their historian, even though all but some eight hundred of eight thousand cubic feet of OSS records are declassified and available in the National Archives. According to an archivist there, the material withheld pertains either to intelligence sources and methods, travel vouchers and records useful for servicing veterans inquiries, and records that “derive from a foreign source or involve third agency equity”; see Lawrence McDonald, “OSS Textual Records at the National Archives: An Outline for Researchers,” *Newsletter*, World War Two Studies Association 61 (Spring 1999): 4–10. Why such records must remain classified over *fifty* years later may be explained by foreign country sensitivities about spies and collaborators, but “third agency equity” (that is, some agency other than CIA) is puzzling. Moreover, discussions within the Nazi War Crimes Commission reveal that the CIA has not declassified estimates of Red Army strength and tactics that frequently were written by accused and even convicted Nazi war criminals. Eduard Mark has, in various articles, begun to make use of OSS records, but primarily to explore the origins of the Cold War; for example, “The OSS in Romania, 1944–1945: An Intelligence Operation of the Early Cold War,” *Intelligence and National Security* 9 (April 1994): 320–44. Jay Jakub, *Spies and Saboteurs: Anglo-American Collaboration and Rivalry in Human Intelligence and Special Operations, 1940–1945* (New York, 1999), studies administrative relationships, but in the process offers a road-map to many of the operational records. On British clandestine activities in the United States see Susan Brewer, *To Win the Peace: British Propaganda in the United States during World War II* (Ithaca, 1997); Nicholas J. Cull, *Selling the War: The British Propaganda Campaign against American “Neutrality” in World War Two* (New York, 1995); and the exaggerated, ahistorical picture drawn by Thomas E. Mahl, *Desperate Deception: British Covert Operations in the United States, 1939–1944* (Washington, 1998).

26. On the dangers of the “stateless” approach see Williamson Murray, “Military Culture Does Matter,” *Foreign Policy Research Institute WIRE* 7 (February 1999). A good example of how to study culture and the military is Omer Bartov, *Hitler’s Army: Soldiers, Nazis, and War in the Third Reich* (New York, 1991). Likewise, Richard Overly, who warns that “material explanations of Soviet victory are never quite convincing,” and that understanding the history of World War II in Russia

and Steven Spielberg have demonstrated, at the individual level campaign history remains high drama.²⁷ But military history needs to be rescued from that same popular success. If, as Winston Churchill believed (and Clemenceau stated), war is too important to be left to the generals, then it is also too important to be left to campaign histories. At the same time, historians must consider that battles rather than politics or ideology frequently determined the parameters within which leaders could act. What may appear part of Britain's fight to preserve its empire, or the expansion of American liberal capitalism, or some monstrous scheme on Stalin's part for world domination, may well be a matter of poor generalship, too few tanks, or the vagaries of weather.²⁸

Moreover, recent textbooks and surveys fail to reflect, or reflect on, the fantasy-fallout from World War II, even though its image as the "good war" may have affected our current history. The spate of "vivid battle epics" about the war, whether on the screen or between hard covers, seems to have contributed to a nostalgic longing for a military intervention with clear moral imperatives – a Hitler to feel good about attacking – an aftereffect of the Second World War that goes way beyond the origins of the Cold War. The frustrations of the Korean and Vietnam Wars play an obvious role in generating that American nostalgia, but World War II provides the reverie.²⁹

What we historians must do is to continue examining the issues and events, to assess the motives and outcomes, that are forgotten, downplayed, and/or misrepresented when the Second World War is relegated to the role of mere prelude to the "real" struggle – the Cold War. At the risk of missing something critical, let me suggest one overarching truth, and three themes. These may not answer all the questions, but they should put us on the right path to determining the appropriate place of World War II in the history of the United States.

depends on "recognizing that some idea of a Russian 'soul' or 'spirit' mattered too much to be written off as mere sentimentality." *Russia's War: Blood Upon the Snow* (New York, 1997), 15.

27. The British historian, Callum A. MacDonald, whose untimely death and superb histories prompted the memorial conference for which this paper was originally written, wrote a first-rate example of a campaign history that transcended just guns and bullets; *The Lost Battle: Crete, 1941* (New York, 1993). Ambrose's *Citizen Soldiers: The U.S. Army from the Normandy Beaches to the Bulge to the Surrender of Germany, June 7, 1944–May 7, 1945* (New York, 1997), and Spielberg's motion picture production, *Saving Private Ryan* (1998), evoke the tragedy and inspiration that battle brings for individuals, but they leave to others the study of the broad political, economic, and social nature and effects of war.

28. This despite the efforts of Mark Stoler to connect military events with politics; see his historiographical essay, "A Half Century of Conflict." I have tried, in a very tentative way, to look at the political implications of military history during World War II; see my *Forged in War*, and "Stalingrad: A Chance for Choices," *Journal of Military History* 60 (January 1996): 89–114.

29. For speculation about the subtle influence of the Second World War on U.S. policy during the 1999 Balkan crisis see Jacob Weisberg, "Bombs and Blockbusters," *New York Times Magazine*, Sunday, 11 April 1999. Les Adler and Thomas Paterson in "Red Fascism: The Merger of Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia in the American Image of Totalitarianism, 1930s–1950s," *American Historical Review* 75 (April 1970): 1046–64, suggest a clear psychological connection for Americans between Hitler and Stalin, Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. But they are fundamentally concerned with the origins of the Cold War, not a yearning for the "good war."

The truth is self-evident but shunted aside in a war seen merely as the origins of another war: Nazi Germany and expansionist Japan were defeated. The themes, discrete but related, are the triumph of liberalism, the Anglo-American special relationship, and the pressure of nationalism and decolonization – two halves of the same walnut.

Victory over the Axis powers created geopolitical conditions that were crucial to the origins of the Cold War – hence William Appleman Williams’s comment that Hitler made Soviet expansion into Europe inevitable, and Anders Stephanson’s suggestion that “unconditional surrender” was the start of the Cold War.³⁰ (The difference between the Williams/Stephanson position and those who condemn the U.S. Grant approach to ending war – unconditional surrender – is a variation on the question of whether the glass is half-empty or half-full. Each refers to the elimination of a potentially strong barrier to Soviet and/or Communist expansion.) But such Cold War considerations pale beside the world-changing significance of the elimination, permanently one hopes, of Nazism, with its systematic inhumanity.

History is no zero-sum game – no either/or set of alternatives. It was not *either* the defeat of Japan *or* Mao’s brutality in China, any more than victory over Hitler guaranteed and required Soviet domination of Eastern Europe. Opportunities should not be confused with causes. The defeat of Germany and Japan did not determine the brutality of Stalin’s and Mao’s conduct, any more than the shift in the geopolitical power structure created the Cold War. Soviet harshness in Eastern Europe came from Leninist preoccupations and Russian fears, not from the defeat of Germany. Even in geopolitical terms, anything less than unconditional surrender was likely to produce some sort of Nazi-Soviet accommodation, an unappetizing prospect for Eastern Europe, and an obscene one for any nation occupied by the Nazis – including Germany itself. Nor is the thought of a military takeover in Berlin attractive. After all, those far from benign German generals had managed to destabilize Europe for nearly a hundred years.

The defeat of Imperial, and imperialist, Japan appears, in retrospect (which is what historians do), a vast improvement over an East Asia ruled in its entirety by a militaristic society that found the Rape of Nanking, systematic brutality in the Philippines, and enforced prostitution appropriate ways to create a Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere. Victory over Germany and Japan *did* change the world – and for the better.

Liberalism triumphant is one of the Second World War’s major themes. Trade, monetary systems, international structures, and politics all shifted toward what Americans called liberalism. (Lord save us from endless and sterile debates over the meaning of “liberalism,” for it changes with the seasons. Suffice

30. William Appleman Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy* (New York, 1962); Anders Stephanson, “Fourteen Notes on the Very Concept of the Cold War,” posted on the H-DIPLO website in 1998, and published in *Rethinking Geopolitics*, ed. Georoid O’Tuathail and Simon Dalby (London, 1998), 62–85.

to say I refer to mid-twentieth-century American liberalism: that amalgam of beliefs in free markets/free enterprise/open door economics, a government concerned for domestic social welfare, democratic political institutions – so long as Communists and Socialists were not elected – and an abiding belief that American institutions and practices can and should be emulated.)

Roosevelt and most of the major figures in his administration were proud, very proud, of the New Deal and its accomplishments. Like the true liberals they were, they wanted to share that truth, those achievements, with the entire world – and zealots with power can make wishes come true, whatever the bitter complaints of Henry Wallace and a few others that FDR had refused to fight a “New Deal War.” The internationalization of the New Deal cries out for further study. Lloyd Gardner’s *Economic Aspects of New Deal Diplomacy* raised the uncomfortable questions thirty years ago, but no one has picked up the gauntlet. Charles Maier pointed us in the right direction, but only a little has been done since his thought-provoking essay, “The Politics of Productivity.” The most obvious internationalizing of New Deal liberalism was in economics, particularly the Bretton Woods agreements, which, because of wartime growth in the U.S. economy, could establish an American-dominated international exchange and currency stabilization system that lasted until the early 1970s – historically as important as the Cold War. A few of us also detected elements of the New Deal in the Morgenthau Plan for Germany, in FDR’s vague ruminations about “educating” European colonies for self-rule, and in some of the international conferences he promoted to deal with agricultural marketing and production contradictions. But we need for the wartime years the kind of book that Barry Karl did for the 1930s, or Alan Milward did for wartime Europe. Michael Hogan, in the early chapters of his book on the Marshall Plan, raised the issue. Carolyn Eisenberg recently touched on it, but her book, *Drawing the Line*, was – you guessed it – about the origins of the Cold War. One recent dissertation has explored the links and parallels between American anti-trust sentiments and insistence on the de-cartelization of Germany. But all that is only a start.³¹

31. Charles Maier, “The Politics of Productivity: Foundations of American International Economic Foreign Policy after World War II,” *International Organization* 31 (Autumn 1977): 607–33. For a sampling of those few who have examined the “external” New Deal, though none comprehensively, see Barry Karl, *The Uneasy State: The United States from 1915 to 1945* (Chicago, 1983); Alan Milward, *War, Economy, and Society: 1939–1945* (Berkeley, 1977); Michael J. Hogan, *The Marshall Plan: America, Britain, and the Reconstruction of Western Europe, 1947–1952* (New York, 1987); Carolyn W. Eisenberg, *Drawing the Line: The American Decision to Divide Germany, 1944–49* (New York, 1996); John Morton Blum, *From the Morgenthau Diaries*, 3 vols. (Boston, 1959–67), particularly “A New Deal in International Economics,” 3:228–78; Lloyd C. Gardner, *Economic Aspects of New Deal Diplomacy* (Madison, 1964) and idem, “The Role of the Commerce and Treasury Departments,” in *Pearl Harbor as History: Japanese-American Relations, 1931–1941*, ed. Dorothy Borg and S. Okamoto (New York, 1973), 261–85; Jürg Martin Gabriel, *The American Conception of Neutrality after 1941* (London, 1988), 42–65; and W. F. Kimball, *Swords Or Ploughshares? The Morgenthau Plan for Defeated Nazi Germany* (Philadelphia, 1976). The dissertation is that of Regina Gramer, “Reconstructing Germany, 1938–1949: U.S. Foreign Policy and the Cartel Question” (Rutgers University, 1996). See also Robert

Is FDR's *political* liberalism and his inchoate but fascinating plan for the postwar world best viewed from the perspective of "origins of the Cold War"? His concerns often focused on the Soviet Union, but as one of the great powers – and there were problems for Roosevelt with all of them, whether the number was three, four, or five.

He held vague but consistent views on how to restructure international relations. The United States had to work with other nations to preserve peace, but it also had to avoid commitments that would drag it into every little argument and local squabble. Wilson's League of Nations proposal had run afoul of that problem, and the American public and Congress rejected the scheme. That experience, added to FDR's assessment of the causes of the two world wars, not some premonition of the Cold War, left him convinced that only the great powers could maintain the peace. "I am not a Wilsonian idealist, I have problems to resolve," he once commented.³² Yet, unvarnished power politics, which most Americans blamed for Europe's wars, was unacceptable.

Roosevelt's solution? That the Anglo-Americans act as policemen after the war, although some sort of international organization might be possible later on. The two nations would, he said early in the war, "have to police the entire world – not on a sanction basis but in trust"; there would be "complete economic and commercial . . . liberty" and frontiers would be open; "but America and England would have to maintain the peace." Disarmament would be key – "the smaller powers might have rifles but nothing more dangerous," he once remarked. Why, he asked, "will it be necessary for these states to defend themselves after this war?" conveniently ignoring the reality that the great powers would never give up their arms.³³

Whether or not the Atlantic Charter and FDR's scheme for making the great powers into world policemen is unrealistic "Wilsonian nonsense" and moral posturing³⁴ is a valid question, but it is one that is likely to get lost in a debate over the origins of the Cold War. Did Roosevelt's vision of the postwar world create the geopolitical tensions and ideological conflicts that became the Cold War? FDR and, in recent years, Churchill have been accused of "selling out" to the Soviet Union, thus consigning Eastern Europe to Soviet domination for forty-five years.³⁵ Even if that assessment is correct, which I doubt, is that an

Vitalis, "The 'New Deal' in Egypt: The Rise of Anglo-American Commercial Competition in World War II and the Fall of Neocolonialism," *Diplomatic History* 20 (Spring 1996): 211–39.

On Bretton Woods and other economic issues see Georg Schild, *Bretton Woods and Dumbarton Oaks* (New York, 1995); and Randall B. Woods, *A Changing of the Guard: Anglo-American Relations, 1941–1946* (Chapel Hill, 1990).

32. Spoken to one of Charles de Gaulle's emissaries; as quoted in John L. Harper, *American Visions of Europe: Franklin D. Roosevelt, George F. Kenman, and Dean C. Acheson* (New York, 1994), 113.

33. Kimball, *Forged in War*, 201–2.

34. John Charmley, *Churchill: The End of Glory* (London, 1993), 460–61. This is not to single out Charmley; he is only the latest such accuser in what is a very long line.

35. In addition to the "new perfectionists" cited in note 15, see also Alexander Mayer's comments on the H-DIPLO website during 1998.

origin of the Cold War, or something properly understood within the context of the Second World War?

Special Relationship routinely engenders the response from Britons – “special for whom?” Whatever the answer, it is difficult to squeeze the question into the category “origins of the Cold War” or to comprehend the debate over the “special relationship” without analyzing the Anglo-American experience during World War II. Whether or not the wartime era is the only time that any sort of “special relationship” existed is debatable;³⁶ what is certain is that the period is crucial, in one way or another, to any understanding of the broader, longer-term aspects of Anglo-American relations and relationships.³⁷ The war

36. Witness the excellent studies by Charles S. Campbell, *From Revolution to Rapprochement: The United States and Great Britain, 1783–1900* (New York, 1974), and three volumes by Bradford Perkins, *The First Rapprochement: England and the United States, 1795–1805* (Philadelphia, 1955), *Prologue to War: England and the United States, 1805–1812* (Berkeley, 1961), and *The Great Rapprochement: England and the United States, 1895–1914* (New York, 1968). But see the cautionary argument of Kinley J. Brauer, “The United States and British Imperial Expansion, 1815–60,” *Diplomatic History* 12 (Winter 1988): 19–37; and idem, “The Great American Desert Revisited,” *Diplomatic History* 13 (Summer 1989): 395–417.

37. The vastness of the literature itself on the “special relationship” suggests that it exists. For starters see Alex Danchev, *On Specialness: Essays in Anglo-American Relations* (New York, 1998). Although Danchev has examined the “special relationship” with penetrating scholarship and a raised eyebrow, he demonstrates that, whatever his doubts, behind every grand generalization lie some devilish details. Some other assessments of the “special relationship,” in order of increasing skepticism, are: the essays in Wm. Roger Louis and Hedley Bull, eds., *The “Special Relationship”: Anglo-American Relations since 1945* (Oxford, 1986); David Reynolds, “A ‘Special Relationship’? America, Britain and the International Order since the Second World War,” *International Affairs* 62 (Winter 1985–86): 1–20; Alan P. Dobson, “Special in Relationship to What? Anglo-American Relations in the Second World War,” in *Britain and the Threat to the Stability in Europe, 1918–1945*, ed. Peter Catterall and C. J. Morris (London, 1993), 124–41; Christopher Thorne, *Allies of a Kind: The United States, Britain, and the War against Japan, 1941–1945* (New York, 1978); and John Charmley, *Churchill’s Grand Alliance: The Anglo-American Special Relationship, 1940–1957* (London, 1995). For a range of views see many of the essays in Ann Lane and Howard Temperley, eds., *The Rise and Fall of the Grand Alliance, 1941–1945* (New York, 1995).

There is, of course, a literature to the contrary. That is particularly true for many of the British memoirs from the Thatcher era, with Geoffrey Howe’s *Conflict of Loyalty* (London, 1995) the obvious exception. Leading Foreign Office personnel during the Thatcher years, including those seconded to the Prime Minister’s Office, claim that there was a “special relationship” based on both tradition and the national interest of both nations, although career diplomats who look to Europe frequently try to soften the reality by pointing out that Britain has a “special” relationship with every nation. For some reason, pundits and scholars seem to view British relations with Europe and relations with the United States as inversely proportional, just as the value of gold and the U.S. dollar used to perform. But that latter equation no longer functions, and I wonder if the former has any validity, but that is all part of the debate; interviews with Sir John Coles (London, 6 May 1998), Sir Charles Powell, (London, 18 May 1998), Sir Antony Acland (Eton, 20 May 1998), and Sir Nicholas Henderson (3 June 1998). Likewise the anecdotal look at the relationship by retired American diplomat (and Anglophile), Raymond Seitz, *Over Here* (London, 1998), and the broad popular survey, *Fighting with Allies: America and Britain in Peace and at War* (New York, 1996), by the British diplomat, Sir Robin Renwick. Then there is there is the clever demi-memoir by British intelligence adviser Percy Craddock, *In Pursuit of British Interests: Reflections on Foreign Policy under Margaret Thatcher and John Major* (London, 1997), which manages to be remarkably informed and uninformative at the same time. For scholarly accounts see C. J. Bartlett, *“The Special Relationship”: A Political History of Anglo-American Relations since 1945* (London, 1992); R. Clarke, *Anglo-American Economic Collaboration in War and Peace, 1942–1949* (Oxford, 1982); A. P. Dobson, *The Politics of the Anglo-American Economic Special Relationship, 1940–1987* (Brighton, 1988);

cemented an already strong association, even if “special” developed an air of junior-senior partnership, not sentimental equality.

Whatever the “roseate hue” that surrounds the Anglo-American wartime partnership, the tensions and disagreements that punctuated the alliance are now commonplaces. (Note that the word “wartime” is rarely if ever used to mean the Cold War, since, for Americans and Britons, it was never wartime in the military sense, except by proxy. But the American and apparently the Soviet governments used and needed the label “war” to gain public support for what was a political, economic, ideological, and psychological contest.) In the Second World War, Churchill, Roosevelt, and their aides got past disputes over alliance military strategy by keeping their eyes on the goal – victory. But political strategy for the postwar world posed different problems. During 1943, FDR’s near-weekly discussions with State Department officials working on plans for the postwar world assumed that Great Britain would be a major economic and political rival. The president confessed that he did not know “what to do about Russia,” but he also worried that Britain would frustrate American designs for economic liberalism, for the elimination of colonial empires, and for responsible international leadership by the great powers.³⁸

Roosevelt repeatedly said he wanted to avoid the appearance of ganging up on the Russians – but he also feared that the British Empire would gang up on the United States. Hence American insistence on great power control of international committees lest the British get three votes by insisting on equality for Canada and Australia. In hindsight, that fear of a powerful, London-led combine seems exaggerated and distorted, but it was a very real concern on the part of Americans, inside and outside the government.³⁹

That is not to say, as some have, that Roosevelt’s “hopes for his brave new world rested largely on the Soviets, not upon the fading and reactionary power of the British Empire.”⁴⁰ Roosevelt did not dismiss Britain as some sort of minor player. If Britain was a “junior partner,” it was still a partner in a very limited partnership of three or four. All of FDR’s thinking about the postwar world required that the British exercise the responsibilities of a great power. In fact,

Richard N. Gardner, *Sterling-Dollar Diplomacy*, exp. ed. (New York, 1969); Woods, *A Changing of the Guard*; and the various and stimulating works of Correlli Barnett on the decline of British power.

38. U.S. Department of State [Harley A. Notter], *Postwar Foreign Policy Preparation, 1939–1945* (Washington, 1950), 92–93, 96–97; and U.S. Department of State, *Post World War II Foreign Policy Planning: State Department Records of Harley A. Notter* [microform in Alexander Library, Rutgers University] (Bethesda, 1987), file 548-1 (a summary of contacts with the president); W. F. Kimball, “A Victorian Tory”: Churchill, the Americans, and Self-Determination,” in *More Adventures with Britannia: Personalities, Politics, and Culture in Britain*, ed. Wm. Roger Louis (New York, 1998), 221–39.

39. On the “ganging up” issue see Warren F. Kimball, ed., *Churchill & Roosevelt: The Complete Correspondence*, 3 vols. (Princeton, 1984), 2: R-418 (11 November 1943); and Robert Sherwood, *Roosevelt and Hopkins: An Intimate History*, rev. ed. (New York, 1950), 707–8.

40. Charmley, *Churchill’s Grand Alliance*, 74. During their Casablanca Conference early in the war, before the Soviet Union demonstrated its military strength, Roosevelt and Churchill succumbed to the temptation to dream of a pax Anglo-Americana. But reality soon set in. See Kimball, “Casablanca: The End of Imperial Romance,” in *The Juggler*, 63–81.

Roosevelt and the Americans routinely exaggerated the wealth of Great Britain and its empire. Britain's military image had suffered during the Second World War, but economic strength and political savvy would be the elements of power in the disarmed world Roosevelt sought.

Then there is American anti-colonialism: much mocked, much criticized, much castigated – and much exaggerated as to its effect. There is no way to understand that impulse and policy under the rubric “origins of the Cold War.” It fit neatly into American liberalism: open doors, access to markets and consumers, representative democracy. At the same time it created serious discord between the Americans and the British – even if many in Whitehall recognized that devolution was inevitable.⁴¹

Nationalism and decolonization connected with liberalism triumphant and the “special relationship” in both complementary and awkward ways for the United States and Great Britain. American anti-colonialism gave moral support to independence movements in the European colonies, much to the distress of Churchill and de Gaulle. But so did Japanese propaganda, at least early on, while Stalin warned Churchill that “after this war all States would be very nationalistic. . . . The feeling to live independently would be the strongest. . . . The fact that Hitler's regime had developed nationalism could be seen in . . . Yugoslavia where . . . all wanted something of their own. It was a symptom.”⁴² Stalin's recognition of both the intensity of nationalism and East European fears of Russia influenced his conduct and, thus, played a role in the way the Cold War developed, but that rebirth of nationalism in Europe is part of Second World War history, a part that needs more study.

I have argued elsewhere that nationalism played “a major role in destroying Big Three collaboration after the war,” and I remain convinced of the overwhelming force of nationalism in modern history.⁴³ Yet the nationalism of Europe is much more than just fear of Russian or Soviet domination; France and de Gaulle (the same thing in his mind), Italy, Greece – all the nations occupied by Germany had a resurgence of nationalism, with or without a Soviet threat and Cold War. Western fears of communism and “the Left,” and Soviet fears of the capitalist powers all interacted with nationalism – and that is one of the “origins of the Cold War” – but the crisis for stability, that touchstone of great power politics, was created by nationalism independently of the East-West conflict. Likewise for nationalist decolonization in the European empires, particularly in South and Southeast Asia. Nor is it adequate to view the Chinese

41. Thorne, *Allies of a Kind*, and Wm. Roger Louis, *Imperialism at Bay: The United States and the Decolonization of the British Empire, 1941–1945* (New York, 1978) both provide ample examples of awareness among British leaders of the need to plan for devolution. Paradoxically, the Cold War soon prompted the United States to encourage and subsidize the maintenance of an informal British “empire” in its ex-colonies; see Wm. Roger Louis and Ronald Robinson, “The Imperialism of Decolonization,” *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 22 (September 1994): 462–511.

42. As quoted in Martin Gilbert, *Winston S. Churchill*, vol. 7, *Road to Victory* (Boston, 1986), 1026.

43. Kimball, *Forged in War*, 293–306.

civil war, which lay quasi-dormant during World War II, as part of the Cold War. Its antecedents lay in anti-Western reactions, personal vendettas, and a struggle for power. Only later did ideology migrate from being a tool into a goal.

Liberalism was not always triumphant, at least not in the short run. Nationalism and decolonization, independence and freedom, were all included under the liberal concept of self-determination (although nationalism is routinely illiberal). It was Poland that came to represent to the West the desire of Eastern Europeans for self-determination, just as Indochina and India did for Asians. Polish nationalism could neither be denied nor quieted – and that clashed with great power control. Just before Churchill went to Moscow for the TOLSTOY talks in October 1944, he told the House of Commons that he could not “conceive that it is not possible to make a good solution whereby Russia gets the security she is entitled to have, . . . and, at the same time, the Polish nation have restored to them that national sovereignty and independence, for which they have never ceased to strive.” Then, in almost the next breath, he set the stage for the percentages agreements that acknowledged the Soviet sphere of influence. Sounding like FDR, the prime minister stated that the “future of the whole world and certainly the future of Europe, perhaps for several generations, depends on the cordial, trustful and comprehending association of the British Empire, the United States and Soviet Russia, and no pains must be spared and no patience grudged which are necessary to bring that supreme hope to fruition.”⁴⁴ Liberalism would take time, and time had to be purchased.

Historical memory is manipulated first by participants, then by historians, especially once the grandparent recollection factor disappears – when participants are no longer around to pass on history to the young. For the Second World War, we are there now; witness a new generation of textbooks and those ubiquitous surveys of the Cold War era. But you know the moment is nigh when the philosopher of the American baby-boomer generation, Jimmy Buffett, announces in song that

Nobody speaks to the Captain no more,
 Nobody talks about the war;
 So what the hell were we fighting for,
 Such a long, long time ago?⁴⁵

Although individual scholars continue to examine the issues intrinsic to World War II, there is an unsettling tendency to generalize to the point of, in the words of one historian, “seeing the forest and losing sight of the trees.”⁴⁶ In the political arena alone there is much history that was unrelated to Cold War origins: the European war for colonial empire, the French war for national salvation and pride, the war of the Jews, Japan’s war on Asian peoples, civil wars

44. Gilbert, *Road to Victory*, 978.

45. (J. Buffett) BMI.

46. The comment is that of Lloyd C. Gardner.

in Europe (particularly in Yugoslavia, France, and Greece), and the conflicts created by collaboration in almost all of the countries occupied by Hitler – Norway, Croatia, Slovakia, France, the Netherlands, and so on.

There are also interactions that relate simultaneously and independently to both Cold War origins *and* the Second World War. To offer but two examples. First, the uncomfortable dilemma of self-determination faced by Churchill – for the East Europeans and Balts but not for the colonies?⁴⁷ Second, the struggle to be in a position to implement Stalin's axiom: "whoever occupies a territory imposes on it his own social system." Churchill's variation on that theme was a bit more elegant, but equally cynical: "the right to guide the course of history is the noblest prize of victory."⁴⁸

I am certainly not belittling the importance of determining the Second World War origins of the Cold War, but World War II cannot and should not be submerged beneath the Cold War iceberg. The Second World War has its own signal importance for history, including American history, that could be lost if we allow it to become, to adapt a phrase from an old science fiction movie, the "incredible shrinking war."

Perhaps Lord Gowrie, lately the chairman of the Arts Council of England, had the answer – or at least the answer I liked. In the tradition of "if you can't beat them, absorb them," he opined that we have got it all backwards; the Second World War did not end until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.⁴⁹ Now there's a periodization I can live with.

47. See Kimball, "A Victorian Tory."

48. Kimball, *Forged in War*, 209.

49. Lord Gowrie interview, 22 April 1997 (London).