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THE END OF WARS AS THE BASIS FOR A LASTING PEACE

A Look at the Great Wars of the Twentieth Century

Donald Kagan

Peace agreements may be judged from several perspectives—their gentleness or severity, their equity or injustice—but perhaps the most important criteria are their prospects for longevity. Whatever its other qualities, a peace cannot be deemed successful if it soon gives way to another war. The Second World War emerged from flaws in the previous peace and the failure of the victors to alter or defend vigilantly and vigorously the settlement they imposed; the collapse of that peace provided influential lessons for the victors in the resulting war. The First World War ended when the collapse of the Central Powers' armies in the Balkans forced the Germans to seek peace. That was not, however, the picture received by most Germans, who for the most part were unaware that their army had been defeated and was crumbling. No foreign soldier stood on German soil. The socialist chancellor of the newly founded republic greeted returning soldiers with the words, "As you return unconquered from the field of battle, I salute you"; it was generally believed that Germany had voluntarily laid down its arms, and that only when President Woodrow Wilson made a reasonable offer of peace.¹ One German town greeted its returning troops with a banner reading, "Welcome, brave soldiers, your work has been done, God and Wilson will carry it on."² The peace the Germans were ultimately required to sign was different from their expectations, and many of them came to believe that Germany had not been defeated but tricked by the enemy and betrayed—even stabbed in the back—by pacifists, Jews, republicans, and socialists at home. This version of history helped bring Hitler to power.

The Second World War richly deserves the title applied to it by Churchill, "the unnecessary war." The victorious nations in the First World War brought it to an end using language of idealistic generosity in which they did not believe,

creating utopian expectations whose inevitable collapse produced bitterness and cynicism and permitted complaints to excuse irresponsible behavior of more than one kind. They vaguely put their hopes for peace in international organizations such as the League of Nations, though no nation abandoned any measure of sovereignty and the League had no armed forces. When the United States failed to ratify the treaty, join the League, or guarantee French security, the entire basis for preserving the peace in the face of a large, bitter, and mainly intact Germany was undermined. The task of preserving the peace fell to France and Britain. Given France's many weaknesses, that meant chiefly Britain.

British leaders in the years between the wars were powerfully impressed by what they took to be the lessons of the First World War. For them the Great War and the terrible destruction that came from it had been caused not by German ambition abetted by British hesitation but by the prewar arms race, the alliance system, and the willingness of Britain to commit a land army of significant size to a war on the continent. British leaders were easily persuaded by the liberal and radical intellectuals of the day who rejected traditional ideas of power balances and military strength as necessary devices for keeping the peace.

Revisionist historians and publicists convinced many in Britain's governing class that the Western allies had been at least as responsible as the Germans for the war, that greater understanding, more generosity, and patience were better ways to avoid war than military deterrence. The British accordingly failed to react to the menace created by German ambitions between the wars, even to the extent they had before 1914. Few took the League of Nations seriously. It served chiefly as a form of self-delusion or an excuse for inaction. Whenever tested, it proved the emptiness of the concept of collective security when not led by states having the will and the means to resist aggression.

Pacifism, isolationism, and other forms of wishful thinking were widespread in Britain and contributed to the mood favoring disarmament and concessions. The idea of maintaining peace through strength was not in fashion. The main damage to international security and the prospect of peace was done in the 1920s, when Britain rapidly disarmed and abandoned its continental responsibilities, deliberately disregarding and denying the threat that Germany would inevitably pose. The British were driven by the traditional desire to remain aloof from continental involvements and maintain "the free hand," by an unwillingness to spend money for arms rather than for increasing social concerns, and by a determination to lower taxes, but most of all by the horrible memories of the last war and the deadly fear of a new one.

The French, much less influenced by the intellectual currents so powerful in Britain and America, were psychologically crippled by the memory of the slaughters of 1914–18, when excessive reliance on the offensive had led to

disaster. French military and political leaders were dominated by that one historical analogy alone. They built the Maginot Line and tried to hide behind it, though it was incomplete and provided an inadequate defense. Their war plans, such as they were, contained no suggestion of taking the offensive first, even against so puny a force as the Germans placed in the Rhineland in 1936.

Had the French and the British between the wars examined their political and strategic situation objectively and realistically, they would have seen that an offensive element was essential to their thoroughly defensive goals of maintaining

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the peace and security of the new Europe. There was no point in feeling guilty about what they had done to Germany at the peace conference.

They were willing to change the terms of the peace, and without compulsion, but what changes would have satisfied Germany? Berlin would consider sufficient only alterations made at the expense of the new nations of Eastern Europe, which had been established on the high principle of national self-determination, as well as the lower one of security for France against a revived and far more powerful Germany. Even a reasonable German nationalist like Gustav Stresemann sought changes unacceptable to the successor states. Adolf Hitler repeated many times, in speeches and in writings, that he wanted the new nations obliterated. Changes like those the Germans wanted were not possible without abandoning both high and low principles. The Western democracies, therefore, had no choice but to defend the status quo against all but minor revisions unless they were prepared to abandon all principle and all security. Had they faced that hard fact, they would have seen that the easiest, cheapest, and safest way to accomplish that end was to keep the Germans effectively disarmed for the foreseeable future. Failing that, they had to keep the Rhineland demilitarized and be prepared to launch an attack through it if the Germans attacked the eastern states. Whatever its faults, such an approach would have been operationally easy and inexpensive; it would have protected the security of Britain, France, and the successor states; and it would have avoided a major war.

No such program was undertaken, because the Western leaders, and many of their people, examined their situation not objectively and realistically but emotionally and hopefully. They were moved by horror of war, fear of its reappearance, and blind hope that refusal to contemplate war and prepare for it, combined with conciliation and generosity toward the beaten foe—never mind the cost to its potential victims—would somehow keep the peace. They paid for their mistake with the most terrible war in history.

The peace that ended the Second World War, however, was entirely different from the one that concluded the first. The leaders of the countries who won the

second conflict learned very different lessons from those that had influenced their predecessors. They insisted on a policy of “unconditional surrender” and held to it, at least in Europe. This time the victorious forces smashed into Germany from east and west, bringing home the reality of defeat to the losers; they were prepared to occupy the enemy’s land until a satisfactory peace had been made. It is ironic that so complete and unquestioned a victory was not concluded by a peace treaty. Even before the end of the war, the split between the Soviet Union and the Western allies began to appear, and the two sides could not agree on a general peace. To deal with immediately unavoidable issues, Russia’s western frontier was moved far into what had been Poland, including part of German East Prussia. In effect, Poland was moved about a hundred miles west, at the expense of Germany, to accommodate the Soviet Union. The Allies agreed that Germany would be divided into occupation zones until the final peace treaty was signed. But it never was signed, and Germany remained divided until the collapse of the Soviet Union almost a half-century later.

A Council of Foreign Ministers was established to draft peace treaties for Germany’s allies. Growing disagreements made the job difficult, and it was not until February 1947 that Italy, Romania, Hungary, Bulgaria, and Finland signed treaties. The Russians, dissatisfied with the treaty that the United States made with Japan in 1951, signed their own agreements with the Japanese in 1956.

By that time Europe was informally but firmly divided, in the context of an informal and uncertain peace. No sooner was the old war over than there seemed to be a threat of a new one between victorious allies. Out of such unpromising beginnings grew a peace that lasted for a half-century without a major war, concluding with the peaceful collapse of one of the competitors in the Cold War and with excellent prospects for peace in the future if the relevant nations learned the proper lessons from this great and surprising success.

The end of the Second World War found Europe in a shambles, potentially a prey to poverty, misery, and the political and military power of the Soviet Union. Only the United States had the economic and military power to restore balance in Europe, but the Americans now began their traditional practice of rapid demobilization, disarmament, and withdrawal from commitments overseas. The threat from the Soviet Union and the onset of the Cold War, however, imposed a recognition and acceptance of reality, a recognition that changed American attitudes and policies. The imposition of communist regimes in Eastern Europe, the menace to the independence of Greece and Turkey, the communist coup in Czechoslovakia, and the blockade of Berlin presented immediate dangers that enabled America’s leaders to persuade their people to undertake the responsibility of continuous engagement in order to create and preserve an international order compatible with their ideals and interests.

The long-range strategy pursued by the United States and its allies was the policy of containment, first set forth by George F. Kennan and gradually adopted in the early years of the Cold War. In this view, America's policy should be guided by traditional, realistic considerations of power: to restore the balance of power in Europe and frustrate Soviet efforts to expand its power and influence, in that way convincing Soviet leaders to change their behavior.³ This could be accomplished chiefly by economic, political, and psychological means designed to surround the Soviets with strong, confident nations, societies that were able to defend themselves against intimidation of whatever sort. This kind of thinking produced the Marshall Plan to restore the strength, confidence, and independence of Europe, and also the reconstruction of the defeated enemies, Japan and West Germany. Kennan understood the importance of military forces in achieving these ends. "You have no idea," he said, "how much it contributes to the general politeness and pleasantness of diplomacy when you have a little quiet armed force in the background. . . . [Its existence] is probably the most important instrumentality of U.S. foreign policy."⁴ But he regarded the Soviet threat as chiefly political, not to be checked by military means alone—a thoroughly reasonable judgment when communist parties were large and threatening in France and Italy, and before the Soviets had an atomic bomb. Kennan's focus was on Western Europe, but his vision of American security was worldwide, with different tactics needed in different parts of the globe.

Kennan also hoped that a successful policy of containment would subject the Soviet empire to internal strains that might dismember it. He even thought that a frustrated Soviet regime might one day crumble internally and be overthrown.⁵

Early in 1950, Paul Nitze replaced Kennan as the head of the State Department's Policy Planning Staff. He and his staff were charged with producing a comprehensive statement of national security policy, the general foundation (that Kennan had never written) of the containment strategy; the result would be the document known as NSC-68. That formulation sought to frustrate Moscow's goal of expanding Soviet power by undermining and overawing other nations. Confronted by steady, determined resistance, Russian leaders might change, live in peace, and behave in tolerable ways. The point was to get the Soviets to accept "the specific and limited conditions requisite to an international environment in which free institutions can flourish, and in which the Russian peoples will have a new chance to work out their destiny."⁶ There were also important weaknesses of the Soviet state that might defeat its aggressive designs from within. The problem of succession faced by all dictatorships might cause internal instability; nationalism and unreasonable Soviet demands might lead satellites to break away, as Iosip Tito's Yugoslavia had done, leading to the dissolution of the Soviet empire; the flaws of its domestic system might bring it down.

Only firm resistance, however, could bring these weaknesses to the fore. “So long as the Kremlin retains the initiative, so long as it can keep on the offensive unchallenged by clearly superior counterforce—spiritual as well as material—its vulnerabilities are largely inoperative and even concealed by its successes. The Kremlin has not yet been given real reason to fear and be diverted by the rot within its system.”⁷

NSC-68 sought to provide a plan for the needed resistance. Important changes had occurred since 1947. Kennan had regarded the international system as stable; recent events, however, suggested anything but stability, as new territories

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fell under communist rule and Soviet military power grew. Defending even the strong points that Kennan had thought important called for an increased American military commitment. In the absence of American military power,

these nations would be intimidated and lose the confidence on which the theory of containment rested. Beyond that, the two-sided struggle had come into focus, bringing the whole world into the picture. While hoping to pursue containment peacefully, through deterrence, the drafters of NSC-68 recognized that it might be necessary on occasion to fight local wars on the periphery.

Nitze therefore called for a vast increase in America’s military capacity and expenditures to permit resistance by conventional forces, not merely by the menace of the atomic bomb, whose credibility had been undermined by its acquisition by the Soviets. There was considerable opposition to the high cost of the program; some feared that it would ruin the American economy. However, NSC-68 argued that with military expenditures representing only 5 percent of the gross national product and the economy operating well below capacity, the needed funds could be acquired by stimulating the economy through the very program being proposed, without inflation and without damage to domestic well-being. That Nitze’s argument was sound would be shown by the economic boom that lasted from the 1950s until the economic distortions caused by the government’s handling of the Vietnam War. In 1950, however, that prospect was far from clear, and President Harry Truman did not give formal approval of the policy until September. By then the outbreak of the Korean War in June seemed to have confirmed the evaluation presented by NSC-68, which thereafter became the foundation stone of American foreign policy.

The policy of containment laid out in these years was a rare example of a state making a rational evaluation of the problems it faced, the nature of its opponent, and the character of the threat to stability and peace, and then deciding on a reasoned course of action with the sacrifices and commitments needed for

success. It was a realistic and nuanced approach that gave full weight to the importance of ideas, economics, institutions, culture, and the need to adapt to change, at the same time as it acknowledged the need for military power and a manifest willingness to use it when necessary.

The adoption of the fully shaped policy of containment required a sharp break with America's past. Contrary to its traditions, the United States thus joined in a continuing alliance with nations in Europe and later in other parts of the world. It consciously undertook the chief burden of preserving the peace under conditions tolerable to itself and its allies, gearing its economy for the purpose and adopting military conscription in peacetime. These taxing and extraordinary measures were taken to meet what American leaders took to be a serious and imminent threat, but they were shaped also by their understanding of the origins of the Second World War. These they took to have been the failure of the Western democracies to meet their responsibilities after the First World War, their withdrawal into isolation, and their unwillingness to bear the cost of keeping the peace, which had been the maintenance of the capacity and will to resist detrimental changes in the balance of power caused by dissatisfied states, which used subversion, threats, and military force to achieve their purposes.

For a time, however, weakened and divided by the war in Vietnam and by domestic travails, American leaders wavered, reverting to an earlier model. They seemed to retreat, to seek to win peace through unilateral reduction of the nation's military power and through attempts at appeasement; the result was *détente*, culminating in the Jimmy Carter administration. In those years Soviet power and influence around the globe grew to unprecedented levels, in extent, boldness, and intensity. "The 1970s witnessed three massive Soviet airlifts and sealifts to client regimes at war, the deployment in combat of over forty thousand Soviet-armed Cuban troops in Africa, and the outright invasion of a Third World country by the USSR—all phenomena unheard of during the [early years of the] Cold War."⁸ By 1982 Soviet combat forces and advisers were to be found in many countries in Asia and Africa: Angola, Cambodia, Iraq, Libya, Mali, Mauritania, Mozambique, the Seychelles, Syria, Vietnam, and North and South Yemen. To these forces could be added military and paramilitary forces from East Germany, Czechoslovakia, and Cuba. Men and equipment from the Soviet Union and its satellites enabled communist forces to gain control of Angola in 1975 and permitted the victory of Haile-Mariam Mengistu's brutal Ethiopian regime over the Somalis in 1978.⁹

None of these interventions could be dismissed by the usual explanations offered by Soviet apologists—that is, some version of self-defense—for such places had no inherent strategic importance or even any historical connection with Russia or the Soviet Union. Western analysts, in fact, had a difficult time

understanding what the Soviets were after and why they were after it. A clue may be provided by the comparison between the Soviet Union and Kaiser Wilhelm's Germany. Like imperial Germany, the Soviet Union displayed a combination (characteristic of arriviste powers) of clamoring aggressiveness, great sensitivity to any slight to its pride, and remarkable indifference to the concerns of others. In 1971 Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko said, in words not too different from those the kaiser had been wont to use, "Today there is no question of significance which can be decided without the Soviet Union or in opposition to it."

The most striking similarities, however, were in the way the two states, dissatisfied with the distribution of power in the world, restlessly sought to undo the status quo and bring about desired changes by building great military forces and trying to use them for political purposes. A sympathetic scholar described the Soviet Union in these terms in the last year of Carter's presidency:

To say it simply, the Soviet Union is interested in fomenting conflicts, escalating conflicts, maintaining them at a high level of intensity, and exploiting them, but not in their peaceful solution, especially in the early stages when they are most susceptible of solution. . . .

The Soviet Union is obviously not a "sated power." Even when measured only from the viewpoint of great-power competition, it is a new, dynamic great power. . . . This situation in itself would render difficult, highly competitive, and unstable any relations with the Soviet Union now and for the foreseeable future. It would certainly preclude realization of those exaggerated hopes of the early [Henry] Kissinger détente construed as a long-range balance of power and agreement of spheres of interest.¹⁰

The Soviet Union's adventurism was surely encouraged by American policy after the Cuban missile crisis. As American military spending decreased, the Soviets did not reciprocate but increased their own expenditures. The signing of the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (SALT), in fact, preceded the greatest advance in the growth of Soviet strategic weapons. Secretary of Defense Harold Brown ruefully drew the conclusion that attempts to encourage arms control by inducing emulation of unilateral restraint had failed: "We have found that when we build weapons, they build. When we stop, they nevertheless continue to build."¹¹ The only plausible explanation of the Soviets' behavior was that they were seeking to acquire the capacity to force the United States, through intimidation, out of the way of their ambitions. At the same time, the United States allowed its conventional forces to decay. It was only the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 that produced a turn away from détente, a return to a policy of containment resting on increased military strength and political will.

Thus, the Carter administration rescinded its proposal for a second SALT agreement, stopped grain shipments and forbade the sale of high technology to

the Soviet Union, withdrew from the Olympic Games to be held in Moscow in 1980, returned to the rhetoric of the early Cold War, and launched a significant increase in military expenditure and preparations. All this came too late to save

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Carter from defeat in the 1980 elections. He was succeeded by Ronald Reagan, a well known critic of détente and identified with the older policy of containment through strength. The new president had run

on a platform calling for rejection of SALT II and for a swift increase in defense spending to gain military preponderance over the Soviet Union.

The Reagan administration moved quickly to keep its promises to increase America's military strength. Among its officials were the foremost critics of previous efforts at arms control, which seemed to them always to have favored the Soviets without reducing either the number and power of weapons or the danger of war. They now insisted on the removal of all the Soviet nuclear-tipped SS-20 missiles that threatened Europe, promising to introduce American intermediate-range missiles with nuclear warheads (as had been planned by Carter) if the Soviets refused. They rejected arms-*limitation* negotiations (like SALT) and proposed arms-*reduction* talks instead, calling for deep cuts in the number of nuclear warheads on each side. Their critics denounced these proposals as cynical efforts to undermine any serious arms negotiations. Indeed, the Soviets broke off negotiations, worrying those who regarded arms control as essential to the prospects of peace and thus feared the consequences of their interruption. The Soviets launched a vast campaign of intimidation to prevent the installation in Europe of intermediate-range Pershing II and cruise missiles, which could reach the Soviet Union and thus would deter use of the SS-20s. They also instigated a worldwide propaganda effort demanding a nuclear "freeze," an idea that won considerable support. Reagan responded with a speech denouncing the Soviet Union as an "evil empire" and "the focus of evil in the modern world."¹² The resort to such language, rarely used since the Truman administration, alarmed those who believed that peace required friendly accommodation and cordial intercourse at all times.

In the "third world," the Reagan administration took the initiative against Soviet expansion. Employing what came to be called the "Reagan Doctrine," it sent aid to the opponents of communism—whom the president called "freedom fighters"—in Afghanistan, Angola, Ethiopia, Cambodia, and Nicaragua, and it used direct military force to remove the communist government of Grenada. Finally, Reagan introduced the Strategic Defense Initiative, a plan to build a system that would provide a defense against missile attacks. Critics called the idea

absurd and labeled it “Star Wars.” On one hand, they insisted it would not work; on the other, they assumed it would and feared that it would destabilize the nuclear status quo, based on “mutually assured destruction.” Like his other actions,

it called into question the President’s seriousness in seeking an end to—or even a significant moderation of—the strategic arms race. . . .

Anyone who listened to the “evil empire” speech or who considered the implications of “Star Wars” might well have concluded that Reagan saw the Soviet-American relationship as an elemental confrontation between virtue and wickedness that would allow neither negotiations nor conciliation in any form; his tone seemed more appropriate to a medieval crusade than to a revival of containment.¹³

In 1984, the best-known writer on arms control gloomily wrote:

The Administration’s conduct of the INF [Intermediate-Range Nuclear Force] talks and START [Strategic Arms Reduction Talks] brought about an unprecedented crisis in the already strained quarter-century-old arms-control process. And the crisis in arms control contributed to three others: in the alliance between the U.S. and Western Europe; in the partnership between the executive and the legislative branches of the U.S. government; and in the Soviet-American relationship. Even if it proved temporary, the deadlock in the negotiations lasted long enough to become one of the factors making Ronald Reagan’s stewardship of foreign policy and national security a contentious issue in the 1984 presidential election.¹⁴

Such dark forebodings were unwarranted. The administration held fast to its course and installed the Pershing IIs and cruise missiles in the Nato countries. Strains between the executive and legislative branches were no greater than usual. Reagan was reelected by an overwhelming margin. Nato was strengthened, not weakened. The Reagan Doctrine’s effort to “‘roll back’ Soviet influence . . . [produced] impressive results at minimum cost and risk to the United States.”¹⁵ The Soviets returned to the negotiating table for arms control talks that ultimately produced unprecedented reductions.

There is reason to believe, moreover, that the pressure applied on the Soviets by the growth of America’s military strength, particularly the exploitation of its lead in technology to produce advanced weapons, had beneficial effects. Far from crippling arms control and increasing tension, the determination to counter the Soviet SS-20s with equivalent missiles for Nato contributed powerfully to arms reduction. At a conference at Princeton in February 1993, Anatoly Chernyaev, who had been a personal consultant on foreign affairs to Soviet president Mikhail Gorbachev, would make clear the relationship: “The SS-20s were a nightmare for Europe, and the Pershing IIs were, of course, a nightmare for us, because they were a gun aimed directly at—our very head.” This situation in

1987 led Gorbachev to decide on “the first treaty of real disarmament that really reduced the number of nuclear weapons[, which was] concluded in Washington in December.”¹⁶ Alexander Bessmertnykh, deputy foreign minister under Gorbachev, would later make even clearer the connection between the Americans’ firmness and the progress of arms control. Referring to the Soviets’ efforts to prevent the installation of intermediate-range missiles into the Nato countries, he was to recall:

I don’t remember when we . . . [had ever] raised this kind of campaign. [We] used all methods possible: pressure, persuasion—everything. . . . So the decision was definitely a great disappointment. And there was a certain mood suddenly cast on Moscow that we [had] failed[,] in that . . . the situation had tremendously deteriorated as far as Soviet interests were concerned. But looking back from today’s position I think that the fact itself has helped to facilitate, to strongly concentrate on the solutions. If it were not for that [deployment,] which was negative to us, maybe the developments would have been slower, took many more years. . . . So it kind of pushed the whole process into much higher speed and finally brought us to a solution.¹⁷

Gorbachev was driven by other considerations as well. At the same conference Bessmertnykh would report, “As for the Soviet Union, we were already feeling the pressure of the arms race. Gorbachev wanted to go on with the reforms[,] and the continued arms race, and especially the nuclear area, was a tremendous hindrance to the future of those reforms.”¹⁸

The Reagan administration’s approach of seeking to keep the peace through strength fit the circumstances well. Some of its members sought chiefly to hasten the decline of Soviet power, and thereby its capacity to threaten the peace and security of other nations, by wearing it down through competition. The president appears to have sought to achieve security through negotiation after achieving a position strong enough to discourage dangerous ambitions. He was prepared to negotiate arms agreements that truly reduced the threat of nuclear war, so long as they did not give the Soviets an advantage. Confident that the Western way of life would triumph in a competition free of intimidation, he was prepared to seek accommodation. His insistence on doing so from a position of strength, and also the confidence the American people had in him and his approach, made such arrangements possible. As one scholar, by no means uncritical of Reagan, has put it:

Others may have seen in the doctrine of “negotiations from strength” a way of avoiding negotiations altogether, but it now seems clear that the President saw in that approach the means of constructing a domestic political base without which agreements with the Russians would almost certainly have foundered, as indeed many of them did in the 1970s. For unless one can sustain domestic support—and

one does not do that by appearing weak—then it is hardly likely that whatever one has arranged with any adversary will actually come to anything. . . .

It fell to Ronald Reagan to preside over the belated but decisive success of the strategy of containment George F. Kennan had first proposed more than four decades earlier. For what were Gorbachev's reforms if not the long-delayed "mellowing" of Soviet society that Kennan had said would take place with the passage of time?¹⁹

The collapse first of the Soviet empire, then of the Communist Party, and then of the Soviet Union itself was, of course, chiefly an internal phenomenon. Its main cause was certainly the perverse unsuitability of the Soviet economic, social, and political system, which might well have brought it down someday in any case. The role of Gorbachev was also very important. His attempt to reform a system incapable of reform inadvertently but surely hastened the collapse. The peaceful resolution of the Cold War, however, was not inevitable. It would be a mistake to minimize the role played by the United States and its allies in bringing it to a peaceful end. It is not only that the leaders of the Soviet Union might have been less cautious and brought on a war through recklessness. In the 1970s the leaders of the United States came very close to abandoning the strategy that was ultimately to succeed, thereby encouraging the very adventures that might have touched off a war. From the John F. Kennedy administration after the 1962 missile crisis through the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, American administrations pursued unilateral disarmament and appeasement under the title of *détente*, an apparent failure of will that reduced America's power and prestige and encouraged the Soviet leaders to undertake adventures that might have sparked a conflict. The return after Afghanistan to the original policy of containment and deterrence through superior strength permitted Soviet power to decay in a context of resigned inferiority rather than dangerous adventure.

Without the resistance presented by the containment policy, the Soviet Union might have gained control of most of Europe and acquired resources that would have given it a much longer run. Instead, the West, employing and returning to the vigorous policy of containment described by Paul Nitze and the team that drew up NSC-68, achieved its goals without a major war. It succeeded in frustrating the Soviet Union's attempts to expand its power by undermining and overawing other nations, which helped persuade its leaders to change their ways and live in peace. It did not seek actively to overthrow the Soviet government or to impoverish or subdue its people. The goal was to get the Soviets to accept "the specific and limited conditions requisite to an international environment in which free institutions can flourish, and in which the Russian peoples will have a new chance to work out their destiny." There is no more Soviet Union, and that is the place at which the Russian people and their former subjects have arrived.

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War demonstrate the soundness of the strategy adopted by the United States after the Second World War, that policy's ability to turn a strange and incomplete peace into an unusually successful one. Its leaders resisted the powerful historical, geographical, and political tendencies that had led their predecessors to isolation and irresponsibility after the First World War. Instead, they chose to accept the burden of preserving the peace by constructing an international order that would require the United States to expend money and effort, to make sacrifices and run risks, and to do so indefinitely. They and their successors were to succeed for the following reasons:

- They faced reality and accepted the responsibility and the price—in money, effort, and risk—of preserving the peace that had cost so much to win.
- They had, and were understood to have, no aggressive or expansionist intentions of their own. This won them the trust and cooperation of the other states that wanted to preserve the peace and were fearful of the intentions of the dissatisfied nations.
- Fully aware of the importance of a wide range of means, they nonetheless faced the fact that political, economic, and military power remain the most important weapons for resisting aggression and preserving peace.
- They had, and despite some lapses maintained, the military strength and economic resources to deter attempts to change the balance of power by force or the threat of force.
- In spite, again, of some important lapses, they retained the will to use their resources and the military strength needed to resist aggression and intimidation.
- They were prepared to accept and adjust to changes that came peacefully and did not threaten the safety of the international order.

The United States in the Cold War carried out its responsibility to its own interests and safety, as well as to those of most of the states in the international system, and thereby helped preserve the peace. Oddly enough, the peace of 1945 that was no peace—in the senses that there was no general treaty and that the victorious powers at once fell out and engaged in a dangerous rivalry that many believed could end only in nuclear war—proved to be one of the more successful peaces in history, and its success provides a valuable lesson. Peace does not keep itself. The formalities and even the conditions of a peace are less important than the determination of those who wish to preserve it. The remarkable men who worked out a strategy to preserve the unpromising peace that

ended the Second World War, and those who tenaciously held to it in spite of the greatest tests and difficulties, deserve the gratitude of all in the world who seek peace and freedom.

NOTES

1. Hajo Holborn, *A History of Modern Germany, 1840–1945* (New York: Knopf, 1969), p. 575.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 561.
3. The discussion of the policy of containment here owes much to the valuable works of John Lewis Gaddis: *The United States and the Origins of the Cold War 1941–1947* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1972); *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of Post-war American National Security Policy* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1982); and *The United States and the End of the Cold War: Implications, Reconsiderations, and Provocations* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1992).
4. Gaddis, *Strategies*, p. 39.
5. Melvyn P. Leffler, *A Preponderance of Power: National Security, the Truman Administration, and the Cold War* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford Univ. Press, 1992), p. 181.
6. Thomas H. Etzold and John Lewis Gaddis, *Containment: Documents on American Policy and Strategy, 1945–1950* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1978), document 52, pp. 390–1.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 396.
8. Bruce D. Porter, *The USSR in Third World Conflicts: Soviet Arms and Diplomacy in Local War, 1945–1980* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1984), pp. 1–2, cited by Patrick Glynn, *Closing Pandora's Box: Arms Races, Arms Control, and the History of the Cold War* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), p. 287.
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11. *Ibid.*, p. 304.
12. Gaddis, *End of the Cold War*, p. 122.
13. *Ibid.*
14. Strobe Talbott, *Deadly Gambits: The Reagan Administration and the Stalemate in Nuclear Arms Control* (New York: Knopf and Random House, 1984), p. xii.
15. Gaddis, *End of the Cold War*, p. 124.
16. Transcript of "A Retrospective on the End of the Cold War," conference sponsored by the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs at Princeton University, Princeton, N.J., second session, p. 22. I am grateful to the sponsors for providing me with transcripts of the meetings.
17. *Ibid.*, vol. 4, p. 14.
18. *Ibid.*, vol. 6, p. 2.
19. Gaddis, *End of the Cold War*, p. 131.

