

The Origins of the Cold War and Contemporary Europe
Charles Maier, editor. New York/London: New Viewpoints, 1978.

Book Review
By Daniel Kendie, Ph.D.

Let me begin with what is generally meant by the "Cold War." The term was coined in 1947 by the American presidential adviser, Bernard Baruch, and subsequently popularized by the late Walter Lippmann—something that Maier does not even care to mention. The Cold War denotes a state of extreme hostility in East/West relations as manifested in the series of psychological, economic, political, and subversive activities carried out by both sides, but short of military actions.

The cause for such a state of affairs, if not the responsibility, has been attributed to, among other things, the activities of international capitalism and particularly to U.S. foreign policy, the communist world's ambitions to conquer the world, and most significantly, Stalin's capacity for mischief, including the Blockade of Berlin, the divisions of Germany, the atomic bomb, and the emergence of China.

This extremely readable book consists of seven essays compiled and edited by Charles Maier. His objective is to help shift the discussion from polemical rhetoric to such concerns as the social milieu in which national policy emerged, the influence of the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R. on countries that once enjoyed superiority in Europe before World War II, and, more specifically, to highlight "the relationship of Soviet-American antagonism to national political and social developments after the Second World War."

In a very useful introduction, Maier provides justifications for why he chose these particular essays. Whether all the selections meet the objectives he has set for himself is a different matter. In fact, there are some sections that do not suit his purpose. In any case, he laments why Cold War historiography has not gone beyond polemics; one reason he suggests is that historians grew upon the ideology which affected their detachment and sense of objectivity. Whether he himself is free from that sin, again, is something else. In fact, his own article in which he castigates historians who do not subscribe to his "detachment" and "sense of objectivity," proves otherwise. The series of introductory remarks he makes before each article also is a further confirmation of his prejudice toward historians who entertain contrary views.

Maier recognizes the key role played by George Kennan and the late Ambassador A. Harriman during the turbulent years of the Cold War. According to him, Kennan had proposed that "a frank acceptance of spheres of influence would have reduced U.S.A.–U.S.S.R. confrontations." However, Maier counters this argument by advising his readers to look at the memoirs of Harriman, who considered the proposal "unrealistic." Which of these two diametrically offered observations shall we accept? The problem with Maier is his incredible capacity to confuse the reader. He affirms something, only to negate it later, thus leaving the reader with nothing. Under such circumstances, one can only wonder at his motive in compiling

the articles. Is it to inform, educate, or to confuse people?

He admits that the Truman Doctrine, as well as the exclusion of Communists from the Belgian, French and Italian governments, contributed to the escalation of the Cold War. But then, and typically, this is centered (balanced?) with the coup d'état in Czechoslovakia and the other mischiefs of Stalin, as if one side was not acting, but reacting, to initiations taken by the other side.

When it comes to the Marshall Plan, we are told that it represented a creative policy vision (P. X11). Why it can be considered creative, and to what end, is simply glossed over. In 1948, the U.S.A. had a GNP of \$258 billion. It did provide \$4 billion annually, i.e. one-fifth of its GNP, for the recovery of some 19 countries. In my opinion, this can only be described as "creative," in so far as (a) both the reconstruction and the recovery programs could provide markets to US goods, (b) new patterns of Europe's dependence on the U.S.A. were created, and (c) the Communist parties of Western Europe, and in the process, the U.S.S.R. were undermined. But typically, Maier wants to mystify the issue.

What he says about the atomic bomb is equally amusing. Comparing the 70,000 casualties of Hiroshima to the Tokyo incendiary raids of 1945, which resulted in the deaths of 84,000 people is, to say the least, an expression of the highest form of political cynicism that is tantamount to being apologetic.

In his article, Maier does provide a summary of the historiography to show the level to which debate and scholarship in the field has grown. He discusses the events which took place from 1947-1948 in the divisions of Europe and the outcome of the Cold War. Maier's crusade against what he calls "revisionist" historians defeats his own advocacy of "detachment." The so-called revisionist historians are scholars who challenge traditional interpretations of facts, question established views, and have revised them to compensate for inaccuracies. They blame the U.S.A. (a) for initiating the Cold War, (b) for its use of the atomic bomb to intimidate Stalin and the U.S.S.R., and (c) for its designs for world domination and hegemony. Apart from being polemical, Maier has no convincing arguments to refute the revisionists. Right or wrong, they do have positions. But one is at a loss to know where he stands. Maier concedes to them here and there. However, he attempts to hide behind such arguments as "one must consider the more fundamental questions of the conceptual bases of revisionist history," or that "their view obscures historical developments" (P.19), or that their approach is "narrow" (P.19). In the end, one can only say this: the rule that he has established, i.e., "even if one despairs of absolute objectivity, there are criteria for minimizing subjectivity," equally applicable to Maier.

Franz Schurmann contends that American imperialism provoked the Cold War because of its decisions to create an empire (P. 55). He argues that Joseph Stalin was prepared to make concessions. However, when he discovered that concessions were followed by more demands, he concluded that the only language the capitalists understood was power and, therefore, Stalin consolidated Russia's control of Eastern Europe (P. 61). Considering what Luza says about Czechoslovakia and, for that matter, George Kennan, what Schurmann says sounds convincing. Unfortunately, his arguments are not supported by documentary evidence. This may be one

reason why Maier chose the article.

Schurmann's interest and intent is theoretical. For him, a theory is an explanatory device, neither true nor false in itself, which demonstrates its worth by generating a continuous chain of derivative explanations of phenomena that are not in conflict with conventional wisdom of certain testable hypotheses. Given that, he argues that trade brought profits which an expanding capitalism needed (P. 42), and that while the universalists believed that capitalism knew no boundaries (P. 49), the isolationists were anti-imperialist (P. 51), and that in the end, the imperialists won the day. But is there a casual connection between capitalism and imperialism? Does capitalism need overseas trade and control in order to expand? Is the export of capital a necessary pre-requisite for the development of capitalism? Could not internal income re-distribution create effective demand to absorb the output? It would indeed be most stimulating if Schurmann had developed and expanded his theory along this line, to demonstrate who was behind America's imperialism, and why.

The article by Luza deals with the history of Czechoslovakia (1945-1948), and attempts to explain why it was difficult for that country to be on its own—as evidenced by its rejection of the \$50 million the Americans had extended to Prague. It did so under Soviet pressure. Although Luza sees Stalin's hand in the communist coup of 1948, he also points out the obvious weakness of the leaders of the non-communist political parties including Edward Benes, who was foolish not to have participated in the negotiation in Moscow (P.78), although he had flown from London for that purpose. He says that the Communists knew what they were doing. They professed a "Broad National Front." When a coalition government was created, they took key ministries like interior, information, education, agriculture, and social welfare (P. 81). When such a highly disciplined party controls the police, the security apparatus, intelligence services, and propaganda, the road to power cannot be far away.

Daniel Yergin, who is described as a revisionist by Maier, examines American policy. He discusses how American leaders of the time conceived of economic power as an instrument of policy to counter Soviet imperialism and to stabilize the world economy in a way that would be favorable to capitalism. In this case, the Marshall Plan—why the U.S.S.R. denounced it as a "plot", why the French resisted it, and how most European communists saw it as an American devise for controlling Europe, is discussed intelligently.

John Gimbel focuses on the negotiations with France, Britain, and the U.S. Army on the bizonal level of industry and the Rhur management plan. He maintains that the French strongly objected to the Marshall Plan because of the consequences it will have on their intention to produce 12 million tons of steel annually. However, when they discovered that America was serious about Germany's economic recovery they gave in. The U.S.S.R. objected to the Marshall Plan, says Grimbel, because they were convinced that it would disrupt their sphere of influence in Eastern Europe. Secondly, they saw it as an alternative to reparations and, therefore, not beneficial to them.

Hardley Arkes argues that the Marshall Plan forced American policy makers to think in terms of advancing the national interest. On the other hand, Lutz Niethammen examines the labor movement after World War II in light of the Cold War, and how it was split along

ideological lines. The article is critical of both the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R.

Finally, let me close the review with these observations. Whether penned by traditional historians or revisionists, most of the articles in the book are based on Western sources. While the revisionists are to be congratulated for questioning the established interpretations of history, and raising the debate to higher level, Maier's intervention seems to me to be obstructionist. The fact that the debate exists by itself is very healthy. However, access to Soviet archives would have been very useful. Only then, it appears, could we can expect a more balanced interpretation of history.

Biographical Sketch

Daniel Kendie graduated (M.SC. honors, Economics), from the University of Prague, and then from the International Institute of Social Studies, The Hague, Netherlands, (M.A. Sociology & Political Science). Subsequently, he was awarded a three-year Fellowship by the United Nations Institute for Training and Research, New York, where he completed a major study on the problems of peace and development in Africa. Having been granted a scholarship and a fellowship by Michigan State University, he completed his Ph.D. there, specializing on the modern history of the Middle East, Africa and Russia/the Soviet Union.

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