



**Martin McCauley.** *Russia, America and the Cold War, 1949-1991.* London and New York: Longman, 1998. v + 154 pp. \$11.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-582-27936-0.



**Reviewed by** Roger Chapman (Bowling Green State University)

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## **Bare Bones and Bones to Pick: The Ideology of Summarizing the Cold War**

If people believe that truth is brevity, then Martin McCauley's *Russia, America and the Cold War, 1949-1991* has the potential of becoming a classic. A summary of the Cold War in one hundred and three pages—supplemented by excerpts from select primary documents, a chronology chart, before-and-after maps of Europe, and a bibliography listing seventy-three main sources—it is a book almost as beautifully thin as Edmund Wilson's vintage polemic *The Cold War and the Income Tax*.<sup>[1]</sup> This latest work by McCauley is a companion piece to his previously published *The Origins of the Cold War, 1941-1949*.<sup>[2]</sup> Both books are part of the Seminar Studies in History series and follow a similar approach of sticking to the bare bones. This new offering, however, is better outlined and more organized, but perhaps at the expense of conveying the complexities and ambiguities that characterized the Cold War.

McCauley breaks the Cold War down into four distinctive periods: Cold War I (1949-1953); To the Brink and Back (1953-1969); Detente (1969-1979); and Cold War II (1979-1985). If Cold War I were to have bookends, then they would be the establishment of NATO and the death

of Stalin; volumes in the middle would include the Berlin blockade, the Soviet testing of an atomic bomb and the American response of developing a hydrogen bomb, and the Korean War in which the two superpowers represent different sides in the conflict. "To the Brink and Back" covers the Khrushchev tenure and its intense struggles with Eisenhower and Kennedy, including the shooting down of the U-2 spy plane and the Cuban missile crisis, and ends with the election of Nixon. Other episodes marking this time period include the establishment of the Warsaw Pact, the Soviet crackdown on Hungary, the Bay of Pigs invasion, the building of the Berlin Wall, and the U.S. involvement in Vietnam.

Detente is characterized by an easing of tensions between the two superpowers and is highlighted by the signing of the first Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) agreement in May 1972, but this period of general calm (overlooking the brutal crackdown of "Prague Spring" in 1968) comes to an end when the Soviets invade Afghanistan. Cold War II is about Reagan and his tough posture toward the "evil empire," but McCauley astutely points out that much was prepared beforehand by Carter

who had increased the American military budget, established a rapid deployment force, put into operation the MX missile, and negotiated secret military pacts with the Chinese (p. 58). However, it has been noted elsewhere that the dismantling of detente actually began during the short-lived Ford administration.[3]

The last two chapters of the book are “New Political Thinking and the Cold War: 1985-1991” and “The Twentieth Century: An Overview.” The “new political thinking” which takes place between 1985 and 1991 was largely a Gorbachev initiative which both Reagan and Bush were very slow at recognizing and acknowledging. For Reagan, the Reykjavik conference in 1986 was a missed opportunity on his part. The year 1991 was marked by the formal disbanding of the Warsaw Pact at the end of March and the official dissolution of the Soviet Union at the end of December. McCauley’s overview of the twentieth century, all explained in fifteen pages, offers his answer to a series of raised questions: What were the sources of hostility between the two superpowers? Why was America the one to guarantee Western Europe’s security? Why did the United States become the systematic rival of the Soviet Union? Why did the Cold War end?

The main sources of conflict between the two superpowers, explains McCauley, were the decision of American leaders to play a global role after 1945, the ideological assumptions of both countries (each thinking that its destiny was to shape the world), and the desire for security (p. 92). After World War II the Western European nations desired economic assistance from the United States, but the only way Truman could secure Congressional approval of such loans was “by exaggerating the Soviet threat.” The Berlin blockade, a Soviet response to the fear of the introduction of the Deutsche mark, and the establishment of a strong West Germany gave a timely credence to the myth of the Soviet threat.

Some policy makers felt that only the United States, as the sole nuclear power, was capable of standing up against such aggression. And in 1949, after the Soviet test explosion of an atomic bomb brought an end to the American nuclear monopoly, the U.S. government drafted NSC-68. That policy document, approved in 1950, established an American Cold War strategy, one that would be followed for the next forty years. In essence, the strategy was to stay ahead of every Soviet advancement. This led to competition, the spiral of arms production, and what McCauley calls the “spiral of angst.” Ideology played a role, in that the Soviets believed in “the kingdom of certainty” while Americans believed that

they “had discovered the laws of human existence and ... [needed] to enlighten others” (pp. 95-97).

According to McCauley, “The Cold War came to an end because it was impossible for two powers to divide and rule the world.” The Soviet Union “buckled and disintegrated” when the burden became too much. At the same time, the United States was less able to intervene in foreign affairs and was much relieved when its rival ceased to exist (p. 101). McCauley suggests that the arms race exhausted the Soviet Union and led to its demise (p. 103). In the United States this interpretation is popular among the politically conservative.[4] But Robert Strayer in *Why Did the Soviet Union Collapse?* points out that other factors should be taken into consideration, among them being the social disillusionment caused by the protracted war in Afghanistan and the progress of reforms in China that preceded Gorbachev by six years.[5]

Some experts would choose to disagree with McCauley for using 1949 as the starting point for the Cold War.[6] But pertinent events prior to 1949 McCauley simply classifies as “origins of the Cold War.” He points out that some believe the Cold War started in 1917 after the Bolsheviks came to power, but he fails to note that this is an extreme minority viewpoint.[7] It seems that the mentioning of 1917 as a potential demarcation is the author’s avoidance of having to explain why events immediately following World War II are not considered part of the Cold War. The truth of the matter is, how one dates the start of the Cold War is an ideological decision. The year 1949 is when the United States established NATO, a resolute action, and this makes a nice beginning point for the grand narrative which ends on the happy note of, “America won the Cold War!” Consider McCauley’s Cold War time-line in the back of the book: “NATO is set up in Washington” is how it begins and “The Soviet Union ceases to exist in international law” is the finale (pp. 132, 141). This makes for neat and tidy history, but it also smacks of victory ritual. Ironically, the use of NATO as a beginning point lends support to the argument that the United States started the Cold War.

Also, in 1949 the Soviet Union dared to acquire a nuclear capability, and so the Cold War started because the “good guys” (the West) had to respond to this sudden threat. But I would point to July 25, 1945, the day Truman recorded in his diary, “We have discovered the most terrible bomb in the history of the world,” adding, “It is certainly a good thing that Hitler’s crowd or Stalin’s did not discover the atomic bomb.”[8] It seems that the Cold War germinated in the mind of a distrusting Truman. (It

has been argued that his dropping two nuclear bombs on Japan was partly motivated by a desire to intimidate Russia—as Cold War strategists often said, Russia respects nothing but power and force.[9])

In March 1946, prior to the Soviet nuclear development, Truman introduced Churchill before an assembly at Westminster College in Fulton, Missouri, and sat and listened while the former prime minister of Britain proclaimed, “From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic, an iron curtain has descended across the Continent.”[10] Surely Truman had some inkling of what Churchill was going to say and his very purposeful presence signaled an endorsement. Stalin afterwards interpreted Churchill’s speech as “a call for war on the U.S.S.R.”[11] Many Russian historians suggest that Churchill’s speech marks the beginning of the Cold War. McCauley would no doubt respond by pointing out that he covers Churchill’s iron curtain speech and Stalin’s reply in his previous book, *Origins of the Cold War*, but even so he classifies these public performances as merely “a turning point.”[12] Michael J. Hogan, in his new book on Truman, designates this time period as “early Cold War,” a much more accurate description than “origins of.”[13]

The twenty-page document, “United States Objectives and Programs for National Security,” otherwise known as NSC-68, has the official date of April 14, 1950.[14] But if it could be regarded as the fruition of policy analysis that was taking place in 1949, then it lends some support for McCauley’s starting point. (NSC-68, for some unknown reason, is not part of McCauley’s Cold War chronology chart in the back of the book.) NSC-68 saw the Soviet Union as “animated by a new fanatic faith, antithetical to our own ... [seeking] to impose its absolute authority on the rest of the world.” The only option for the United States, therefore, was to recognize that “the cold war is in fact a real war in which the survival of the free world is at stake.” According to McCauley, NSC-68 “had a formative influence on the way America waged the Cold War, until it was superseded by the changed environment of detente” (p. 15).

Yet even if we were to all agree that NSC-68 is the first comprehensive Cold War text produced by American policymakers, it does not prove a beginning point for the Cold War. The essence of NSC-68 can be found in the diary of Eisenhower, in his entry for September 16, 1947. “The main issue is dictatorship versus a form of government only by the consent of the governed,” was Eisenhower’s assessment of the international situation. Russia was the problem—its “direct conquest” and “infiltration”—

and the only solution was “adequate military strength” and the restoration of “broken economies” that otherwise “will almost certainly fall prey to communism.” The general who was the commander of the D-Day invasion dramatically ends the day’s diary installment with, “Unity is more necessary than it was in Overlord.”[15] Such discourse is similar to what one finds in NSC-68. McCauley apparently believes that NSC-68 represented a new direction, and maybe it did, but a counter-argument might suggest that it was simply the consolidation of policies already in existence and manifested by the Truman Doctrine, the Marshall Plan, and NATO. Robert R. Bowie and Richard H. Immerman, in their new book on Eisenhower, offer the thesis, “While the cold war originated under Harry S. Truman, it took its mature form under Eisenhower.”[16]

McCauley would have the reader believe that the Truman Doctrine and Marshall Plan, both of 1947, preceded the Cold War. The Truman Doctrine was a response to political and social upheaval taking place in Greece and Turkey. The United States appropriated \$400 million to bring stabilization to those two countries in order to prevent “seeds of totalitarianism” from sprouting into plants. In other words, Truman was taking action to beat the Soviets from taking action. The same reasoning was behind the Marshall Plan. In George C. Marshall’s June 5 speech at Harvard University, he revealed a tension of denial and reality. On one hand there was the denial that the Marshall Plan was an opposition to the Soviet Union: “Our policy is directed not against any country or doctrine but against hunger, poverty, desperation, and chaos.” And on the other hand there was the reality that it was, in fact, an anti-Soviet safeguard: “Any government which maneuvers to block the recovery of other countries cannot expect help from us. Furthermore, governments, political parties, or groups which seek to perpetuate human misery in order to profit therefrom politically or otherwise will encounter the opposition of the United States.”[17] Charles E. Bohlen, the American diplomat and expert on American-Soviet affairs, felt that the Cold War had its beginning when Marshall took over the State Department in January 1947.[18] But it should be obvious that the Truman Doctrine, the Marshall Plan, the establishment of NATO, and the drafting of NSC-68 are links in the same Cold War chain.

Near the end of the book the question is raised: Was the United States an imperialistic power? McCauley’s answer is yes, but he categorizes it as “benign imperialism” (p. 103). Whether or not the United States continues to be an imperialistic power is not addressed, but

any observant reader considering the material McCauley has presented may wonder how the author came up with “benign” as a qualifier. It was not a benign act when the United States threatened nuclear retaliation against China for its dispute with Taiwan (p. 28). Neither was the CIA in 1960 being benign when it considered assassinating Lumumba, the prime minister of Congo (p. 30). Instigating a secessionist movement in Indonesia, for the hope of creating disunity and overall weakness, was American foreign policy not at its benign best (p. 30).

The Bay of Pigs invasion may have seemed like a slapstick comedy to some observers, but it was certainly not a benign act (p. 36). It was benign that Kennedy removed the Jupiter missiles in Turkey after the Cuban missile crisis, but had the United States not deployed them in the first place there probably would not have been a dangerous standoff (p. 37). The American intervention in Vietnam was not benign, unless something good can be said about B-52 carpet bombings, napalm, Agent Orange, and the war crimes of My Lai 4 (pp. 37-39). Also, McCauley does not consider how it was far from being gracious when the United States refused to help other countries that would not totally endorse its foreign policy. A case in point: American funding for the construction of the Aswan dam in Egypt was withdrawn because Nasser refused to be a U.S. puppet (p. 29). Had the author offered any details about the 1954 Guatemalan coup, another less than benign intrigue of the United States would have been noted. None of this is to imply that the Soviet Union was benign in all of its policies, but McCauley is wrong to be so charitable in evaluating American interventionism.

McCauley also states that America’s “benign imperialism” has made the world richer (p. 103). To his credit, he does point out that some of the countries where the United States intervened remain the poorest in the world: Angola, Zaire (Congo), Somalia, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Guatemala, and El Salvador (p. 102). Even so, to hail the world as now richer overlooks the great economic imbalances. It is said that 80 percent of the world’s trade is now controlled by five hundred multinational companies, half of which are based in the United States, Germany, Japan, and Switzerland. Also, from 1980 to 1990 the net financial transfers from the South to the North were “equal to about ten Marshall Plans.” And from 1984 to 1990 transfers from the Third World to commercial banks in the West amounted to about \$180 billion.[19]

One writer notes, “The total wealth of fewer than

four hundred billionaires is estimated to equal close to the combined incomes of the poorest 45 percent of the world’s population.”[20] It would probably be more accurate to state that America’s “benign imperialism” has made some in the world richer. In making the claim that the world is now richer, McCauley offers no reflection on the monetary costs of waging the Cold War. It is now estimated that the United States spent \$5.5 trillion on its nuclear arsenal. At the present moment, the United States reportedly spends \$96 million a day on the nuclear system it inherited from the Cold War.[21] It staggers the mind to wonder how the world might be different if such funding could have been invested into more humane undertakings.

The documents section, the best part of the book, has nothing from NSC-68 (although a small portion of that policy statement is quoted in the main text). It is also unfortunate that Kennedy’s 1963 American University speech is not included. I would have also added to the collection Reagan’s 1983 “evil empire” speech. An omission in the book entirely is the nuclear policy of Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD). Strangely, considering the space limitations, an excerpt from Billy Graham’s *Just as I Am* is one of the documents, revealing a 1961 conversation in which Kennedy professed a belief in the domino theory. The arrangement of the documents is not in chronological order, which can be confusing. On a positive note, documents representing the Soviet Union are included and constitute a significant portion.

McCauley, a senior lecturer in politics for the School of Slavonic and East European Studies at the University of London, has presented a book that can be added to the mountain of volumes on the Cold War that have already been written. Does *Russia, America and the Cold War, 1949-1991* offer anything new? The answer is no. Unfortunately, some will be attracted to the book by its slim size. It is easy to envision a class of undergraduates being assigned this work for gaining a quick overview. The documents section provides an illusion that what is being presented is just the facts. However, what the reader gets is a dosage of cultural hegemony, a Cold War tale presented through Western eyewear. A work so small in size should just be the bare bones, but in actuality this book has bones that need to be picked out in order for it to be made safe to swallow. With McCauley’s excellent credentials he could have produced an overview of the Cold War with more careful commentary accenting the perceptions of both sides of the conflict. Instead, what we have is a book which, while appearing to be objective, actually has the molecular structure of Western victory

culture.

Notes:

[1]. Edmund Wilson, *The Cold War and the Income Tax* (New York: Signet Classics, 1963). Wilson's book of 128 pages is thicker than McCauley's book only because the typeset is larger. Wilson quotes from the U.S. government's *The Budget in Brief* (for the fiscal year ending July 1, 1964), a primary source too often overlooked by the historian: "The Nation faces unprecedented challenges at home ... In 1964 the Federal Government will continue to build a defensive and retaliatory power designed to deter aggression. At the same time, it will seek to strengthen the foundations of freedom around the world ..." (p. 55, in Wilson's book). Also, in the same federal government brochure on the budget, "The Federal Government's final responsibility is to help safeguard the peace and security of the free world. This is our largest category of expenditures" (p. 56).

[2]. Martin McCauley, *The Origins of the Cold War, 1941-1949*, Seminar Studies in History (London and New York: Longman, 1983, 1996).

[3]. This is the conclusion reached by Anne Hessing Cahn, *Killing Detente: The Right Attacks the CIA* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998).

[4]. An example of the conservative view is represented by Richard Gid Powers, *Not Without Honor: The History of American Anticommunism* (New York and London: The Free Press, 1995), pp. 421-429. For a more sophisticated analysis of why the Cold War ended, see H. W. Brands, *The Devil We Knew: Americans and the Cold War* (New York and Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 187-228. For a treatment which presents multiple perspectives, see Ralph Summy and Michael E. Salla, eds., *Why the Cold War Ended: A Range of Interpretations* (Westport, Conn. and London: Greenwood Press, 1995). For a viewpoint that suggests nobody won the Cold War, see Richard Ned Lebow and Janice Gross Stein, *We All Lost the Cold War* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994).

[5]. Robert Strayer, *Why Did the Soviet Union Collapse?* (Armonk, N.Y. and London: M.E. Sharpe, 1998), pp. 127-30.

[6]. See Walter Lippman, *The Cold War: A Study in U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York: Harper, 1947). The opening sentence of McCauley's *Russia, America and the Cold War* states, "The term 'Cold War' was popularized by the US columnist Walter Lippman and entered general

usage in 1947." But McCauley maintains that the Cold War started in 1949. It seems odd that the term preceded the occurrence. How could this be? Either Lippman was an amazing prophet/psychic or he was simply an observant journalist. Lippman's book was partly a response to George F. Kennan's X-Article ("The Sources of Soviet Conduct"), the American manifesto advocating a U.S. containment policy toward the Soviet Union. Although published in 1947, Kennan's essay is actually based on the February 1946 "Long Telegram" he sent to his superiors at the State Department. In other words, events that Lippmann "popularized" as the Cold War extend back to at least 1946. According to Carl Cavanaugh Hodge, "William Averill Harrison (1891-1986)," in *Notable U.S. Ambassadors Since 1775*, ed. Cathal J. Donal (Westport, Conn. and London: Greenwood Press, 1997), the American ambassador Harrison judged that the Cold War started during the San Francisco conference (April-June, 1945) over the issue of Poland (p. 140). Harrison, believing that the Cold War was in progress, helped publicize Kennan's "Long Telegram."

[7]. For an analysis of the charge that Woodrow Wilson helped start the Cold War (because of the 1918-1920 Allied interventions in Bolshevik Russia), see Betty Miller Unterberger, "Woodrow Wilson and the Cold War," in *The Liberal Persuasion: Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. and the Challenge of the American Past*, ed. John Patrick Diggins (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997), pp. 199-213.

[8]. Truman quoted in Robert H. Ferrell, *Off the Record: The Private Papers of Harry S. Truman* (New York: Harper and Row, 1980), pp. 55-56. Or see URL: <http://www.peak.org/~{}danneng/decision/hst-j125.html>.

[9]. See William Appleman Williams, "The Cold War Revisionist," *The Nation*, 13 November 1967, pp. 492-495. In this article Williams challenges Arthur Schlesinger for "nearly ignoring the role of the bomb in the origins of the cold war" (p. 495). Also, see Mitchell Lerner, "Review of Dennis D. Wainstock, *The Decision to Drop the Atomic Bomb*," H-PCAACA, H-Net Reviews, January 1997, URL: <http://www.h-net.msu.edu/reviews/showrev.cgi?path=15685859474359>.

[10]. The complete text of Winston Churchill's "Sinews of Peace" speech (13 March 1946) is available on the internet, URL: <http://www.winstonchurchill.org/sinews.htm>.

- [11]. For the complete text of Stalin's response to Churchill's iron curtain speech, see Walter LaFeber, *The Origins of the Cold War, 1941-1947: A Historical Problem with Interpretations and Documents* (New York and London: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1971), pp. 139-43.
- [12]. McCauley, *Origins of the Cold War*, pp. 55, 73, 132-34.
- [13]. Michael J. Hogan, *A Cross of Iron: Harry S. Truman and the Origins of the National Security State, 1945-1954* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1998).
- [14]. The complete text of document NSC-68 can be found in Thomas H. Etzold and John Lewis Gaddis, *Containment: Documents on American Policy and Strategy, 1945-1950* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), pp. 385-442.
- [15]. Dwight D. Eisenhower, *The Eisenhower Diaries*, ed. Robert H. Ferrell (New York and London: W. W. Norton and Company, 1981), pp. 143-44.
- [16]. Robert R. Bowie and Richard H. Immerman, *Waging Peace: How Eisenhower Shaped an Enduring Cold War Strategy* (New York and Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 3.
- [17]. The text of "The Marshall Plan Speech" can be found on the internet, URL: <http://www.usis.usemb.se/topical/pol/marshall/mp-spch.htm>.
- [18]. Charles E. Bohlen, *Witness to History, 1929-1969* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1973), p. 260.
- [19]. Sherif Hetata, "Dollarization, Fragmentation, and God," in *The Cultures of Globalization*, eds. Frederic Jameson and Masao Miyoshi (Durham, N.C. and London: Duke University Press, 1998), pp. 274-75.
- [20]. Rajni Kothari, "Globalization: A World Adrift," *Alternatives*, 22 (1997), pp. 227-67.
- [21]. See Stephen Schwartz, *Atomic Audit: The Costs and Consequences of U.S. Nuclear Weapons Since 1940* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 1998). Portions of the book's findings are on the internet, URL: <http://www.brook.edu/fp/projects/nucwcost/weapons.htm>.
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