

FORUM

GEORGE F. KENNAN AND THE COLD WAR: PERSPECTIVES ON JOHN GADDIS'S BIOGRAPHY

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION: The historiography of the Cold War has long accorded an outsize role to George F. Kennan, who died in March 2005 at age 101. Despite Kennan's prominence, his tangible impact on U.S. foreign policy is not always clear and was limited to the latter half of the 1940s. Kennan earned a reputation as the "architect" of U.S. containment policy, but he was arguably at his most influential in the late 1940s in pushing for aggressive peacetime covert operations against the Soviet bloc, including demolition, sabotage, assistance to armed guerrillas in "underground resistance movements," and support for other "indigenous anti-Communist elements." When officials at the newly formed U.S. Central Intelligence Agency initially demurred about pursuing such actions, Kennan pushed harder for expansive high-level authorization. In that sense, he was at least as much an architect of "rollback" as of containment. Kennan's authorship of the Long Telegram in 1946 and of the "X" article in *Foreign Affairs* in 1947, the many classified memoranda he wrote when he was a diplomat and when he briefly served as the first head of the U.S. State Department's Policy Planning Staff, and his prolific public writings about U.S. foreign policy and the Soviet Union after he left the State Department have long been grist for the scholarly mill. A voluminous literature about Kennan and the Cold War began appearing several decades before he died, and many more books and articles will be published in coming years.

No book about Kennan has been as eagerly awaited as the landmark biography published by John Lewis Gaddis, *George F. Kennan: An American Life* (New York: Penguin Press, 2011). Gaddis was already a highly respected historian when he agreed in 1981 to write the authorized biography of Kennan and publish it after Kennan's death. Little did Gaddis realize, however, that he would have to wait some 25 years—more than a decade-and-a-half after the Cold War itself ended—until Kennan died. The delay, far from harming the book, worked to Gaddis's benefit because he gained access to a much wider range of archival sources once the Cold War was over, including materials in translation from the former USSR. The book is the crowning achievement in Gaddis's distinguished career as a historian of the Cold War, earning him the Pulitzer Prize among other honors.

To mark this historiographic milestone, we asked nine experts (some of whom have produced their own books about Kennan) to write commentaries about Gaddis's *George F. Kennan*. Five of the contributors are based at U.S. universities (though one of these, Anders Stephanson, was born in Sweden), but we also solicited the views of

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two leading Russian historians, a Czech scholar, and an Australian scholar. By assembling specialists on a variety of issues and from numerous countries, we have aimed to cover as many aspects of Kennan and his career as possible, judging these against the account provided by Gaddis. Most of the commentators praise Gaddis's book (albeit with caveats), but Stephanson and Barton J. Bernstein offer much harsher appraisals. After the nine commentaries, the forum concludes with a reply by Gaddis to his critics.

—Mark Kramer