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Marc Trachtenberg. "The United States and Eastern Europe in 1945: A Reassessment."

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Author's Response by Marc Trachtenberg

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Contents

Introduction by Thomas Maddux, California State University, Northridge.....	2
Review by Fraser J. Harbutt, Emory University	8
Review by Eduard Mark, Department of the Air Force	12
Review by James McAllister, Williams College	34
Review by Norman M. Naimark, Stanford University.....	40
Author's Response by Marc Trachtenberg, University of California, Los Angeles	45

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Introduction by Thomas Maddux, California State University, Northridge

Marc Trachtenberg's "The United States and Eastern Europe in 1945: A Reassessment" returns historians and political scientists to "ground zero" of the origins of the Cold War historiographical debates that have periodically erupted over the fate of Eastern Europe, the nature of Soviet intentions and policy, and the stance of the U.S. from Franklin D. Roosevelt in WWII through Harry S. Truman and his advisers in 1947. Contemporary conservative critics quickly accused FDR of selling out Eastern Europe to Josef Stalin at the Yalta Conference and they blamed Truman for following FDR's approach for too long and losing an opportunity to roll back the Soviet sphere before it hardened into an Eastern bloc of communist dominated regimes under Soviet hegemony.

Each new generation of historians has returned (eagerly or unwillingly) to this important issue marking the transition from the Grand Alliance cooperation in WW2 to the beginnings of the Cold War confrontation. Critics may suggest that too many diplomatic historians have never left this preoccupation with the origins question. The proliferation of studies exploring international history and areas far beyond Europe, using categories of analysis such as race, gender, and culture, and extending their perspectives back to the 18th century, however, indicates that historians and political scientists are no longer fixated on the origins of the Cold War.

Trachtenberg takes us back to this area just as Wilson D. Miscamble did in *From Roosevelt to Truman: Potsdam, Hiroshima, and the Cold War* (2007), the subject, like several other such books, of an H-Diplo roundtable.¹ That this topic receives so much recurring attention suggests not only its continuing relevance to specialists as it recedes into history. It also speaks to the challenges of writing contemporary history when primary sources remain limited or inaccessible especially on the Soviet side and other sources—Department of State records, manuscript collections, memoirs—cannot provide the complete story, particularly with respect to the motivations and expectations of policy makers on all sides. As the author of *The Craft of International History: A Guide to Method*, Trachtenberg is of course familiar with these challenges but is determined to pursue further an elusive topic that he initially raised in *A Constructed Peace: The Making of the European Settlement, 1945-1963* (1999).

Trachtenberg's thesis provides a reassessment of Secretary of State James Byrnes who has been criticized both by revisionists, who argue that he took a hard anti-Soviet line on issues from the atomic bombing of Japan to the German reparations issue at the Potsdam Conference, and by traditionalists, who argue that he pursued FDR's accommodationist approach to Stalin. In his recent assessment, Miscamble depicts President Truman as

¹ For the Miscamble roundtable and others on Tysuyoshi Hasegawa's *Racing the Enemy: Stalin, Truman, and the Surrender of Japan* (2005), Arnold Offner's *Another Such Victory: President Truman and the Cold War, 1945-1953* (2002), Robert Beisner's *Dean Acheson; A Life in the Cold War* (2006), and Melvyn Leffler, *For the Soul of Mankind: The United States, the Soviet Union, and the Cold War* (2007), see <http://www.h-net.org/~diplo/roundtables/>.

relying for too long on Byrnes' efforts in 1945-46 to cooperate with Stalin without taking a quid-pro-quo approach on issues such as Eastern Europe. As James McAllister asks in his review, "was Brynes a hardliner, an appeaser, or simply someone who had no fixed plans or strategy at all when it came to the nature and structure of the postwar world?" (1) Trachtenberg suggests a fourth perspective: that Brynes had a strategic vision to achieve a stable settlement with the Soviet Union which would be based on a spheres of influence approach grounded on the results of the war. As Trachtenberg summarizes the results of Brynes' strategy after the Moscow Foreign Ministers Conference in December 1945, the U.S. and the Soviet Union "could live with each other if they pulled apart" and could reach a real understanding if they respected each other's sphere and the political systems they were setting up in Western Europe, Eastern Europe, and Japan. Brynes "thought essentially in political and not moral terms. He accepted fundamental political realities for what they were, and he wanted the other side to relate to the world in that same businesslike way," suggests Trachtenberg, who concludes that the strategy seemed to be working by the end of 1945 but failed in 1946-1947. (131-132)

The reviewers disagree with aspects of Trachtenberg's analysis with respect to Stalin's perspective, the question as to whether Byrnes pursued a different strategy from FDR, and (in Eduard Mark's assessment in particular) whether Byrnes accepted a closed Soviet sphere in Eastern Europe as opposed to continuing efforts to obtain a Soviet security sphere without total communist domination. Trachtenberg addresses the reviewers' assessments at length in his response and offers further insights on the difficulties historians face both in determining Byrnes' intentions as well as the important interaction of structural forces, the domestic political environment, and the preferences of policy makers.

1) Trachtenberg's focus is on Byrnes but any assessment of U.S. policy on Eastern Europe has to consider Stalin's strategy and objectives in Eastern Europe and beyond in order to evaluate the pros and cons of Byrnes' approach. Trachtenberg starts with this question and, citing recent works by Vojtech Mastny, Geoffrey Roberts, Vladislav Zubok, and Eduard Mark, affirms his agreement with the view that Stalin preferred an accommodation with the United States to consolidate his hegemony in Eastern Europe in a gradual manner before pursuing new opportunities. (94-95) Among the reviewers, Norman Naimark disagrees the most with this perspective as it relates to appropriate U.S. strategy. Noting the limited documentary evidence available on Stalin's perspective, Naimark suggests that historians have to guess about Stalin's motivations. "Stalin was also a consummate dissimulator," warns Naimark. "Depending on the circumstances, the interlocutors, and the goals of the conversation, he said different, even diametrically opposed things." (2) Naimark recommends a stick and carrot U.S. approach to Stalin on Poland, Germany and Eastern Europe in contrast with FDR's, Truman's and Brynes policies in 1945, noting the prostrate condition of the Soviet Union, and Stalin's desire for a long period of peace for reconstruction and aid from the U.S. on reparations from Germany and loans.

2) With respect to Trachtenberg's thesis on Byrnes' strategy, the reviewers have mixed views its persuasiveness. McAllister carefully evaluates the thesis of Byrnes' willingness to

accept Soviet hegemony over Eastern Europe from Poland to Romania and Bulgaria versus Eduard Mark's interpretation that Byrnes and his State Department advisers such as Charles Bohlen hoped to obtain an open sphere even as they negotiated recognition of communist-dominated regimes in these countries at the Moscow CFM. McAllister notes challenges to both evaluations but concludes that the "weight of the evidence favors Trachtenberg's interpretation, emphasizing that Truman backed off from earlier Roosevelt demands on Poland with the Harry Hopkins' negotiations in May and Byrnes proposed a settlement on Bulgaria and Romania along the Polish lines at the London CFS which Stalin accepted at the Moscow CFM. (5-6) Fraser Harbutt gives Trachtenberg credit for demonstrating Byrnes' effort to achieve an understanding with the Soviet Union and notes that "American diplomacy in this period was more substantive and purposeful than many historians have been willing to allow." (1) Harbutt, however, places Byrnes more in the context of FDR's basic approach of expedient wartime cooperation and necessary postwar cooperation to shape an enduring peace. Byrnes' bargaining mode of diplomacy, Harbutt emphasizes, was similar to that of FDR as well as British efforts to arrange a geopolitical settlement, a Stalin-Churchill spheres accord and Soviet support for FDR's United Nations. Hopkins and Byrnes carried forward the FDR accommodationist approach through December, according to Harbutt, but Byrnes lost the initiative in the face of growing public and Presidential concerns about the results in Poland and Eastern Europe.

3) Eduard Mark agrees with Trachtenberg's thesis that Byrnes tried to negotiate a settlement on Poland and Eastern Europe that would respect Soviet security interests, but Mark disagrees with Trachtenberg as to whether Byrnes and his State advisers had given up on obtaining an open sphere without pervasive Soviet and communist domination on internal affairs. In a sustained response, Mark emphasizes the importance of examining Byrnes' policies in the broad context of U.S. policy in Europe, "the fundamental concerns and perceptions that shaped American policy," the interaction of views about Soviet policy with developments in Eastern Europe and "perceived vulnerabilities in the Soviet position in Eastern Europe," and views on the impact on Western Europe of what happened in Eastern Europe. (6-7) Mark suggests that Byrnes and State officials received reports in 1945 concerning weakness in the Soviet position, most notably the rejection of communist leaders as "Russian stooges," armed unrest in Poland and the Ukraine, and reports about an emerging anti-communist underground. (6-13) Within this context, Mark suggests that Byrnes proposed a deal at London and Moscow that would encourage the prospects for less rather than more Soviet influence and thereby communist domination in Eastern Europe by extending recognition to the regimes in Romania and Bulgaria and then moving on to negotiate peace treaties before the "final riveting of communist-dominated regimes in Eastern Europe." (15) Finally, Mark extends his thesis on Byrnes' approach into 1946 to demonstrate that the Secretary had not accepted a closed Soviet sphere, noting Byrnes' public statements, memoir, and stances at ensuing CFM's at Paris and New York and the Paris Peace Conference. (15-16)

4) Trachtenberg suggests Byrnes and Stalin made a deal at the Moscow CFM along the lines of Byrnes' proposal that the two sides pull apart and respect either other's sphere. Trachtenberg extends the deal from the Potsdam conference with the implicit acceptance of a division of Germany by each side taking reparations from their own zones (120) to

Stalin talking with Averell Harriman in October about abandoning a proposal for an Allied Control Commission in Japan to facilitate a Soviet role in the occupation (125-126). There was no overt deal at the Moscow CFM, but Trachtenberg notes the effort of U.S. officials to emphasize the importance of having the final say in Japan as the Soviets had in the Balkans, and Byrnes stressed in his instructions to Harriman that the Soviet commander would have the final say on occupation matters in Romanian and Bulgaria. (128-130) The preliminary negotiations had worked out the compromise, Trachtenberg suggests, “and the two sides did not need to engage in any serious horse-trading at the Moscow Conference. Their real feelings had already been revealed, and the elements of the agreement now fell into place, like ripe fruit falling from a tree.” (130)

5) So there was an agreement linked to the Moscow CFM but did it add up to Trachtenberg’s thesis that Byrnes sought and achieved a “real understanding with the USSR on the fundamental issue of how the postwar world was to be organized” with each side respecting the postwar status quo and the political systems of each side? (131) The reviewers are doubtful on both sides of the table. “Doubts creep in ... because it is hard to see any good will or collaborative impulse in Soviet actions in the immediate aftermath,” concludes Harbutt. (4) McAllister applauds Trachtenberg’s effort but emphasizes the lack of durability in any accord as “issues like Iran, Turkey, and atomic energy could and did shake that foundation in 1946.” McAllister also points out that Byrnes never explained his strategy to very many officials in Washington, perhaps not even to President Truman, and definitely did not launch a campaign to muster Congressional and public support for an accommodation. (6) Naimark does not believe that Stalin ever agreed to a general accommodation with Byrnes as distinct from specific limited agreements. At Potsdam, for example, Naimark views Stalin as rejecting a division and resisting Byrnes on reparations and retaining a desire for “access to and indefinite military control over all of Germany,” and writes that “neither the Soviets nor the Americans thought a divided Germany would work in 1945.” (4) Naimark also doubts that the Japanese issue contributed to a deal at Moscow as the U.S. had all of the leverage on Japan and Stalin had already failed to secure a Red Army presence on Hokkaido despite a major effort to occupy the Kurils and invade Hokkaido before the end of the war.² Mark suggests that rather than a grand accommodation at Moscow as a product of Byrnes’ strategy, the Moscow CFM did not represent the conclusion of Byrnes’ and the State Department’s efforts to encourage a Soviet troop withdrawal and the achievement of an open sphere.

Trachtenberg concludes the essay by suggesting a puzzle that needs further explanation: “If both the United States and the Soviet Union were willing to live with things as they were—if each accepted, and made clear to the other that it accepted, a divided world—where was the problem? Why couldn’t the two sides just go their separate ways in peace? Why, in particular, did things move off the track so dramatically and so quickly in 1946 and 1947?”

Participants:

² See Tsuyoshi Hasegawa, *Racing the Enemy: Stalin, Truman, and the Surrender of Japan* (Cambridge, 2005), 251-288.

Marc Trachtenberg received his Ph.D. in History from UC Berkeley (1974) and is a Professor of Political Science at UCLA. Trachtenberg studies national security strategy, diplomatic history, and international relations. His award winning book, *A Constructed Peace: The Making of the European Settlement, 1945-1963* (Princeton University Press, 1999), explores the profound impact of nuclear weapons on the conduct of international relations during the Cold War, making extensive use of newly opened documentary archives in Europe and the United States. *History and Strategy* (Princeton University Press, 1991) studies seminal events like the onset of World War I and the Cuban Missile Crisis to shed light on the role of force in international affairs. He has also published *Reparation in World Politics: France and European Economic Diplomacy, 1916-1923* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980); and *The Craft of International History: A Guide to Method* (Princeton University Press, 2006).

Fraser J. Harbutt received his doctorate at the University of California at Berkeley in 1976 and taught subsequently at UCLA, Smith College and the University of Pennsylvania before joining the faculty at Emory University where he is now Professor of History specializing in American diplomatic and international history. His publications include *The Iron Curtain: Churchill, America and the Origins of the Cold War* (Oxford University Press, 1986) which was co-winner of the Bernath Prize; and *The Cold War Era* (Blackwell, 2002). His new book: *Yalta, 1945: Europe and America at the Crossroads*, will be published by Cambridge University Press later this year." He is presently engaged on a study provisionally entitled "Churchill and America.

Eduard Mark works as a historian for the U.S. Air Force in Washington, D.C. His next article, "In Re Alger Hiss: A Final Verdict from the Archive of the KGB," will appear this summer in *The Journal of Cold War Studies*. With David Alvarez he is completing *As Through A Glass Darkly: American Intelligence and European Communism, 1944-1947*. Another work, "A Glooming Peace:" *The Grand Strategy of the United States and the Defense of Western Europe, 1946-1954* is now at the final stop of its seemingly interminable journey of declassification. In his official capacity is currently working on a history of planning for nuclear war in the first decade of the Cold War based primarily on the records of the Strategic Air Command, Headquarters U. S. Air Force, and the Joint Staff.

James McAllister is a Professor of Political Science at Williams College. His publications include: *No Exit: America and the German Problem 1943-1954* (Cornell University Press, 2002); "The Lost Revolution: Edward Lansdale and the American Defeat in Vietnam 1964-1968," *Small Wars and Insurgencies* (2003), pp.1-26; "A Fiasco of Noble Proportions: The Johnson Administration and the South Vietnamese Elections of 1967," *Pacific Historical Review* (2004), pp.619-652; "The Limits of Influence in Vietnam: Great Britain, the United States, and the Diem Regime, 1959-1963," *Small Wars and Insurgencies* (2006), pp.22-43. [Coauthored with Ian Schulte.]; "Only Religions Count in Vietnam: Thich Tri Quang and the Vietnam War," *Modern Asian Studies* (2008), pp.751-782; "What Can One Man Do? Nguyen Duc Thang and the Limits of Reform in South Vietnam," *Journal of Vietnam Studies* (forthcoming 2008).

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The Significance of James F. Byrnes' 1945 Diplomacy.

Thanks to Marc Trachtenberg for reviving, not for the first time, an issue long neglected or prematurely thought settled. In the broadest sense the disinterred topic here is nothing less than the notorious "Origins of the Cold War", a historiographical monster long left for dead by most of its exhausted disputants. The specific issue before us - an analysis of the part played in U.S.- Soviet relations in the latter half of 1945 by Secretary of State James F. Byrnes - is one of several signs that the beast has simply been hibernating and is about to re-emerge, perhaps to wreak havoc among us again.

There are many valuable insights in the Trachtenberg article. Byrnes was an important figure, far from the opportunistic lightweight portrayed by George F. Kennan and others at the time. I agree that Byrnes' conduct in 1945 was directed to achieving "a real understanding with the USSR over Eastern Europe" (p.131) and that American diplomacy in this period was more substantive and purposeful than many historians have been willing to allow.

I have some reservations, however, about the height of the pedestal Marc Trachtenberg is building here. By focusing almost exclusively upon Byrnes' 1945 efforts rather than putting them into the context of earlier and later American diplomacy, the article narrows the focus and perhaps elevates him a little too much. Byrnes was, I think, an impressively creative negotiator but I would question whether the conceptions he was working on in 1945 were as original as Trachtenberg implies when he asks, concerning American leaders in their approach to the Soviet Union earlier in the war, "Did they even have a policy in any real sense of the term?" (p. 96). I would not claim that President Roosevelt's approach to the whole Soviet political issue was clear or unambiguous. But I would not go so far as to say there was no policy.

I would be inclined to put it this way. FDR's basic approach was to do whatever was necessary to keep the Soviets in the war. As political issues inevitably appeared this developed into a highly generalized commitment to "accommodation," a conception with at least some of the characteristics of a policy. Roosevelt propagated this loosely in public in uplifting terms of "collaboration" and "cooperation" but when concrete issues loomed up he tried, as is well known, to keep everything as vague as possible. However, from late 1943 on through the Yalta conference of February 1945 he found it necessary to respond to Soviet pressure and move toward more substantive but morally dubious arrangements with Stalin over Poland and Eastern Europe, tangible "accommodations" that he never fully acknowledged in public, resorting instead to political manipulation and deceit, particularly over the true nature of the Yalta understandings. Publicly, and perhaps genuinely in his own mind, he rationalized such moves by a characteristically determined optimism that we can, however, see declining from early, buoyant expressions of faith that the experience of war was "transforming" Stalin and the Soviet Union, to more chastened hopes after Yalta

that, appearances to the contrary notwithstanding, there would be some kind of constructive postwar “evolution” in Soviet conduct.

I would argue, therefore, that Byrnes’ significant efforts in 1945 (he was certainly the most persistent, vigorous American statesman of the era) were derived only marginally from Harry Hopkins’ May 1945 negotiation on the Polish issue in Moscow, and more deeply from the line taken earlier during the war by an accommodating President Roosevelt. There was nothing new in 1945 about the expectation in Washington and London that Stalin would, with or without Allied agreement, control postwar Eastern Europe. Nor was there anything unfamiliar about the bargaining mode of diplomacy which Trachtenberg, rightly I think, identifies as Byrnes’ *modus operandi*. But it was Stalin who had inaugurated this approach long before as he worked systematically during the war to obtain Allied acceptance of his war aims. His principal effort was with Britain, his chosen partner in the geopolitical disposition of postwar Europe. From the Stalin-Eden talks in Moscow in December 1941 to the Stalin-Churchill “spheres” agreement of October 1944 (and beyond up to the Yalta conference) we see the steady development of a mutually satisfactory Anglo-Soviet understanding about a postwar Europe, which was to be divided into a Soviet order encompassing Eastern and much of Central Europe adjoining a British-led arena taking in Western Europe and the Mediterranean.

Perhaps because the U.S. was not closely involved with these arrangements many diplomatic historians tend, wrongly I think, to overlook or take a dismissive view of them. A neglected feature of Cold War history, moreover, is the elusive but still demonstrable fact that Stalin also successfully pressed Roosevelt into a bargaining mode of negotiation, though this was a much less obvious operation. For while the *quid pro quo* he offered the British was essentially geopolitical and territorial and therefore much more visible, the consideration he offered FDR in return for acceptance of the desired Soviet sphere was more subtly advanced and tactically withheld, namely Soviet support for and engagement in the United Nations project. Stalin first asserted this bargain with some delicacy at the Teheran conference in late 1943, and later rather more obviously before, at, and after the Yalta conference in February 1945. It was still the underlying (and still unacknowledged by Washington) basis for agreement during the Stalin-Hopkins negotiation over Poland in May 1945. FDR had in his time responded to Stalin (also with some delicacy) but for fear of public revulsion never acknowledged openly, even to his close associates, that he was working on these lines. The effect of the post-Yalta manipulations he felt it necessary to orchestrate to cover up the true character of his conduct in the Crimea was to create a fateful gap between the artificially created public euphoria with which the results of this pivotal conference was initially greeted in the United States on the one hand, and on the other the politico-diplomatic facts of life as they were understood by concerned leaders and officials in all the Allied capitals.

It was, therefore, in the strained aftermath of the post-Yalta confusion and crisis (soon made worse by the sudden substitution of Truman for Roosevelt) that Hopkins and then Byrnes tried, not to raise new basic issues supposedly ignored during the war, but rather to restore the principle and extend the substance of Rooseveltian accommodation in their dealings with Stalin and Molotov. At the purely diplomatic level they seemed to be, as

Trachtenberg shows, quite successful: Hopkins in resolving the Polish issue; Byrnes at Potsdam, and then at Moscow in December 1945 where he conceded Soviet hegemony in Rumania and Bulgaria in return for a free hand in postwar Japan. But in the end these efforts failed to restore good U.S.-Soviet relations, an outcome Trachtenberg calls “puzzling.”(p.132) because, as he puts it, “A genuine political understanding was in the cards in December 1945.” (p. 132).

Here too, I think, we can look for an explanation of the puzzle by broadening the context. Rooseveltian accommodation still had some salience through 1945 as Marc Trachtenberg clearly shows. But by December the official and mainstream mood in the United States was already ominously inclined to skepticism and disenchantment. In most respects the downward spiral in U.S.-Soviet relations (which were never as close or engaged as Anglo-Soviet relations) can be traced to the accumulating acids of a process that included the contradictory American and Soviet visions of Yalta in February; the crisis and geopolitical re-alignments that followed, notably the breakdown of Anglo-Soviet collaboration and the consequent coming together of the Western powers; the inevitable destabilizing end of war tensions; the appearance of the atomic bomb; and the growing impression in the United States that the Soviet were bent on an expansionist and unilateral course. In this unstable context Roosevelt’s cooperative, evolutionary scenario never really took root, either in public sentiment or in the mind of President Truman whose unease and increasing impatience with the problems presented to him by Soviet conduct are well-attested. In the first instance then it seems that we should look, as most historians have done, to negative tendencies of this kind on the homefront to explain why Byrnes’ apparent diplomatic success in Europe was quickly followed by a political failure in Washington. It is tempting to see this as a latter-day manifestation of the similar experience of Woodrow Wilson in 1919, which Roosevelt had avoided after Yalta only by systematic public mystification of a kind obviously not open to a mere Secretary of State. But the better view is perhaps that Byrnes simply ran out of time as Soviet expansionism and American public sentiment steadily moved through 1945 toward collision and confrontation.

But it is unlikely that these accumulating but not yet fully crystallized impulses back in the United States, crucial though they are to any full understanding of events, were the immediate, direct cause of the transformation in Byrnes’ approach that we clearly see early in 1946, it is doubtful even that he received the personal dressing down from Truman often cited as the explanation of his volte-face. As late as February 4, for instance, the Secretary was still talking enthusiastically to reporters about the prospects of accommodation with the Soviets. May we not look more profitably, in our search for enlightenment, to the further Soviet “provocations” (as they were widely viewed in the United States) which appeared at the beginning of the year? And here we might ask whether the Moscow conference of December 1945 was quite the success in Soviet eyes that Marc Trachtenberg claims. Doubts creep in here because it is hard to see any goodwill or collaborative impulse in Soviet actions in the immediate aftermath of that meeting. Instead during January 1946 we see highly visible Soviet menaces in northern Iran and elsewhere as well as an angry, recriminatory performance in the inaugural meeting of the United Nations Security Council in London, all capped by Stalin’s “election” speech on February 9 asserting the incompatibility of communism and capitalism.

However that may be, the conceptual framework of the new “firmer” American line that these Soviets actions appear to have inspired in February 1946 seems to have come from others, specifically from Kennan in his “Long Telegram” of February 22 and Churchill in his talks with Truman and Byrnes early in February and most dramatically in his “Iron Curtain” speech at Fulton, Missouri on March 5. It was they who comprehensively and authoritatively defined what they saw as the aggressive, menacing character of Soviet policy for their respective official and public audiences, and who also were careful to prescribe with clarity the desirable new policy lines. Byrnes was certainly in the thick of things during this period and especially in conducting the ensuing “reorientation. He was indeed, as he had been in 1945, the executor of American policy. But, as before, he worked within a framework set by others. To this there is perhaps the proverbial exception that helps prove the point. For I think Trachtenberg is right to credit Byrnes with some genuine authorship of the intriguing “pulling apart” conception. It is true that neither the Soviets, who always rejected any potential intrusions in their chosen sphere of action, nor the American statesmen of the war period whose talk of “partnership” or “One World” solidarity was mostly rhetoric for public consumption, showed much real or practical interest in breaking down politico-economic barriers and “coming together”. But it must be conceded that Byrnes was the statesman who at Potsdam grasped the German nettle (scrupulously avoided even by the British in their otherwise comparatively intimate and practical dealings with the Soviets) and steadily fostered thereafter the policies that led to a fuller American commitment in that crucial arena and eventually to partition.

If I were to write a full study of Byrnes’ conduct of American foreign policy, I would be inclined to sub-title it “ Last of the Rooseveltians; First of the Cold Warriors.” He performed in each of these roles with energy and political skill. He was an impressive negotiator, politically sensitive and always resourceful. But if it is unfair to call him an opportunist, it would be implausible to swing right across the spectrum and see him as the profoundly insightful statesman who might, had he been listened to respectfully, have saved us from the Cold War. His skills were those of the consummate political technician. They might very well have been profitably employed during the Rooseveltian wartime years when, one can always surmise, better agreements may conceivably have been hammered out with Stalin before what should always have been foreseen as the two great prospective incompatibilities - Soviet postwar ambition and American public scrutiny - came fully into play and began to converge and thus narrow the possibilities. By early 1946 it was too late and Byrnes, a major figure fully worth Marc Trachtenberg’s illuminating rehabilitation but not in the last analysis a man likely to defend a lost cause, moved quickly and from all appearances congenially to his place in the new dispensation.

In “The United States and Eastern Europe in 1945: A Reassessment” Marc Trachtenberg elaborates a thesis he first advanced in *A Constructed Peace*: that from the time of the Potsdam Conference, Secretary of State James F. Byrnes sought a settlement with the Soviet Union based upon spheres of influence of an extreme and exclusive sort. The book applied the thesis primarily to Germany; with his article Professor Trachtenberg now extends it to the region to which I limit my attention for want of more space -- Eastern Europe. The idea that the United States was willing to settle for a spheres-of-influence peace is not original, although Trachtenberg’s development of it certainly is. Since the publication of my “American Policy toward Eastern Europe and the Origins of the Cold War, 1941–1946: An Alternative Interpretation” in the *Journal of American History* in 1981, scholars have tended to accept that American statesmen were from a point early in World War II disposed to tolerate a Soviet sphere of influence in Eastern Europe, provided that it was pretty much confined to foreign policy, as proved to be the case with Finland. The phrase that I coined to describe such regional arrangements – “open sphere of influence” – is now widely used both in the United States and abroad to distinguish such dispensations from the “exclusive sphere of influence” that actually developed in Eastern Europe.¹

A Misconstructed Peace

Professor Trachtenberg’s conception of the spheres-of-influence settlement that Byrnes allegedly sought differs fundamentally from the one that I proposed in 1981. In *A Constructed Peace* Trachtenberg correctly observed that until Byrnes became secretary of state the preferred American solution for Eastern Europe was that the nations of the region should be “closely aligned with Russia on matters of foreign and military policy” but retain “a large measure of autonomy on domestic issues.”² But Byrnes, in his view, instituted a radically new policy:

The United States would make it clear that it was willing to live with a Soviet-dominated Eastern Europe—that it would be willing to live with the Communist regimes that were the instruments of Soviet control there—and the Soviet Union, for its part, would respect U.S. interests on the western side of the line of demarcation in Europe, as well as in certain other key areas like Japan. The two sides could get along not by trying to “cooperate,” Roosevelt-style—that is, by trying to work hand-in-hand with each other on whatever problems turned up. Instead, they could get along by pulling apart.³

1. The term “exclusive sphere of influence” was in common use by the end of World War II, as may be seen from some of the passages quoted below. There was, however, no settled way of referring to acceptable arrangements in which hegemons secured their strategic interests while permitting their clients domestic self-determination and full participation in international commercial and cultural life. For that reason I coined the phrase “open sphere of influence.”

2. Marc Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace: The Making of the European Settlement, 1945-1963* (Princeton, 1999), 9-10, 14 n. 31.

3. Marc Trachtenberg, “The United States and Eastern Europe in 1945: A Reassessment,” *The Journal of Cold War Studies*, 10 (Fall, 2008), 116.

American acceptance of a Soviet sphere in Eastern Europe consisting of “Communist regimes that were the instruments of Soviet control” was thus total and unconditional, unmitigated by principle, sympathy, or concern for geopolitical consequences. But Trachtenberg differs from the traditional conservative critique of American foreign policy in the early Cold War in that Byrnes figures in his work not as a dupe or witless appeaser, but rather as a sharp trader who demanded and received a quid pro quo for Eastern Europe in the form of Soviet acceptance of American predominance in Western Europe and Japan.

Trachtenberg, accordingly, takes specific exception to my view that through most of 1946 at least, Byrnes tried to keep Soviet predominance in Eastern Europe within certain limits out of concern for possible effects on the international system. That view I now reaffirm, convinced that it has been made more certain than ever by newly available materials from both European and American archives. I maintain, too, that Trachtenberg is quite mistaken in his assertion that Byrnes had given up on cooperation with the Soviets as early as 1945 and that the entire logic of postwar American foreign policy dictated against an early and unconditional surrender of Eastern Europe to Moscow’s uncertain mercies.

Professor Trachtenberg limits his discussion of Byrnes’ policy toward Eastern Europe to 1945. But in *A Constructed Peace* he carried the story forward, writing that Byrnes “turned against the Soviets” in early 1946, chiefly because of the developing crisis in the Near East. But in his view there was no change of policy towards Eastern Europe, although it was implemented in a different spirit. No more was there hope of amicable separation, but rather a kind of proto-containment: a line had been “drawn around the periphery of the area that has been consigned to the Soviets, and there was a growing willingness to defend that line if necessary with military force.”⁴

Not the least problem with Trachtenberg’s thesis is that Byrnes, although angered and alarmed by Soviet actions with respect to Iran and Turkey, demonstrably persevered through 1946 with the policy toward Eastern Europe that he had developed in 1945. At the Paris Conference of Foreign Ministers (April 25-May 25 and June 15-July 12 1946) and the Paris Peace Conference (July 29-August 13, 1946) he tried to institutionalize in various ways a Soviet open sphere in Eastern Europe. He openly conceded the USSR’s “special security interests” in Eastern Europe, but never to the point of signaling publicly or privately that he was willing to accept “Communist regimes that were the instruments of Soviet control there.”

Byrnes and Eastern Europe

One of the more curious things about Professor Trachtenberg’s essay is that he treats what Byrnes himself had to say about his own policy as nothing more than an inconvenient distraction. Byrnes, in fact, is allowed to speak in his own behalf *but once*. After noting that there is an argument – my argument -- that Byrnes calculated “that the signing of peace

4. Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace*, 35, 38, 40-1.

treaties would lead to a withdrawal of Soviet troops from those countries and that, with the Red Army gone, the Communists would not be able to hold on to power there,” he comments

there is not much evidence to show that Byrnes was actually thinking along these lines at the end of the year. The strongest piece of evidence cited in support of this thesis is from a volume of memoirs Byrnes published in 1958, in which he claimed that until peace treaties were signed “the Soviets would have an excuse to keep large military forces in the Balkans and in Austria,” and that, protected by those forces, “their agents could work to take control of, or strengthen the Russian hold on, occupied countries.” But it is hard to believe that for Byrnes in late 1945 such legalistic arguments carried much weight—that he actually thought that if peace treaties could be signed, the Soviet Union, deprived of an excuse, would pull its forces out and allow the Communist regimes in the area to collapse.⁵

This description of Byrnes’ policy is inaccurate and incomplete. . It ignores the explanations that Byrnes gave in his testimony before Congress and in major speeches and in his book *Speaking Frankly* (1947), which Trachtenberg nowhere mentions. It disregards information to be found in the press, which Byrnes – a longtime Washington insider – worked expertly. It dismisses the testimony of officials who worked with Byrnes like Charles E. Bohlen and James Riddleberger as well as official statements of policy. It also obscures the fact that the peace treaties were only part of a comprehensive and multifaceted settlement for Eastern Europe that Byrnes offered to Moscow in an effort to reconcile American and Soviet interests in Europe. Far from being “legalistic,” the settlement was eminently realistic – if one accepted, as Byrnes did, that Moscow’s actions in Eastern Europe were quite likely motivated by suspicion and that its purchase on Eastern Europe was shaky rather than strong. And of the settlement that Byrnes proposed no part – not even Byrnes’s famous offer of a treaty for the demilitarization of Germany – finds a place in his essay. Also conspicuous by their absence are the steady demands of the United States for the free elections promised first by Yalta’s “Declaration on Liberated Europe” and then incorporated into peace treaties and efforts to use inducements like economic aid and trade to see that the pledges were honored.

Missing as well from Trachtenberg’s presentation is the explicit threat that accompanied Byrnes’ diplomatic efforts in Paris: that if the Soviets did not agree to a postwar European settlement acceptable to the United States and its allies, the latter would proceed in Western Europe without consulting them. And this was no idle threat, as the Anglo-American agreement of July 1946 for the economic unification of the British and American zones of occupation in Germany showed. The force of this threat lay in the fears often expressed by the Soviets of a western bloc oriented against them and, more particularly, in Moscow’s great interest in having a say in the management of German industry, most of which lay in the western zones of occupation.

5. Trachtenberg, “The United States and Eastern Europe in 1945,” 114.

There are many other striking omissions and oversights. Professor Trachtenberg essentially limits his discussion to two countries: Poland, and Romania, which stand in for “Eastern Europe.”⁶ Austria, Finland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary receive no mention. Soviet policy developed differently in the second group of countries from the way it did in the first. Through 1945 and 1946 these countries (save for Hungary) caused American policy makers no great concern even when (as in the case of Austria) there were substantial disagreements between the United States and the USSR about specific matters. For Trachtenberg, “Eastern Europe” was lost by the end of 1945 and the pattern of Soviet policy was everywhere obvious and essentially the same. But Soviet policy was actually not uniform, and American officials were for a while in some doubt as to whether the first or second group of countries was the better index of Moscow’s intentions – a question that historians still debate. There was in the United States, moreover, no consensus about either the nature of Soviet Communism or its purposes. Since the mid-1930s four quite different interpretations of Stalinism had found influential exponents and divided public opinion. On balance, they suggested that Stalinist Communism differed from Bolshevism, and that revolutionary commitments perhaps counted for less than national interests.⁷ These uncertainties afforded a certain space for the hope that it might be possible to work out a settlement for Eastern Europe somewhat better than a bloc of “Communist regimes that were the instruments of Soviet control there.” There could be no great confidence of that, of course. But the danger of a Europe divided into hostile blocs was clear. And that was reason enough for Byrnes to pursue the course that he did.

The Secretary initially calculated – despite British counsel to the contrary – that refusal to recognize the interim governments of the former German satellites of Bulgaria, Hungary, and Romania would cause the Soviets to make their governments more representative. (In August the United States recognized Hungary because of promising political developments there.) The policy of non-recognition was rooted in the perception (discussed below) that the Soviets’ position in Eastern Europe was weak rather than strong, as Professor Trachtenberg incorrectly supposes. It appeared, therefore, that Moscow might need American recognition of its client regimes, which Byrnes withheld pending reorganizations of some of the interim governments that held power in Eastern Europe pending elections to establish permanent governments. At the London Council of Foreign Ministers (September 1945) Byrnes persevered with the policy of non-recognition. But he also sought early conclusions of peace treaties which, while ending the Soviet occupations in Eastern Europe, would also have reduced the former German satellites to military nullities and have granted the victorious powers – i.e., the Soviet Union -- rights of intervention to throttle renascent fascism or militarism. The result, taken with the military alliances that Moscow had already concluded with its neighbors, would have been a largely “Finlandized” Eastern Europe. This, Byrnes calculated, might ease the insecurity that in his view explained much

6. Trachtenberg makes fleeting mention of Bulgaria which, like Yugoslavia, falls into a distinct category. During the war the Communist-dominated Fatherland Front developed an effective partisan army that was able to seize power even before the Red Army reached Bulgaria.

7. Eduard Mark, “October or Thermidor: Interpretations of Stalinism and the Perception of Soviet Foreign Policy in the United States, 1927-1947,” *The American Historical Review*, 94 October 1989), 937-962.

of Soviet policy.⁸ Further to palliate Soviet insecurity, Byrnes also proposed at London the treaty to guarantee the demilitarization of Germany that became the centerpiece of his policy. This initiative was closely connected with Eastern Europe: Byrnes explained at the time that it would “relieve Sov. mind of any fear of invasion and they could let the small neighboring countries go along their paths of peace and democracy.”⁹ Thus, even at the London CFM of September 1945 there were present – *pace* Professor Trachtenberg – *all the central elements of the policy that he pursued at the CFMs of 1946 and the Paris Peace Conference of the same year.*

Byrnes’s operational assumption was that Soviet policy represented a clumsy attempt to assuage a gnawing sense of insecurity partially attributable to a sense that the world was “ganging up” on them.¹⁰ This was a common belief at the end of the war. James W. Riddleberger – Chief of State’s Division of Central European Affairs and the author of the draft treaty of demilitarization for Germany – put it this way:

There was still a hope as early as the spring and summer of ‘46, that they might be a way of diminishing some of this tension and still meet the legitimate Soviet demands . . . [Byrnes] had a highly pragmatic mind. He thought that if some of the Soviet suspicion could be removed, if some of their fears could be removed, by a formal U.S. commitment, then that was worth trying.¹¹

In October 1945 the State Department’s leading expert on Romania, Cloyce Huston, explained the Soviets’ policy toward that country in terms of the inter-war *cordon sanitaire*: It was the Soviets’ purpose, Huston argued, to see that the barrier was never rebuilt and that Eastern Europe should never against be a springboard for an attack against the USSR. They knew that if they were to withdrawn their armies from Romania, “the Rumanians would begin immediately and frantically to rebuild the wall, like ants hurrying to repair a disturbed anthill.”¹² Even Maynard Barnes, the representative in Bulgaria who was perhaps the most belligerent American diplomat in Eastern Europe, also believed it vital to allay “Russian suspicion.”¹³

But Byrnes also coupled reassurance of the Soviets with a frankly stated intention to limit Soviet influence over Eastern Europe and the former German satellites in particular. To see so, one needs to look no further than the Secretary’s testimony before the Senate’s Committee on Foreign Relations in May 1947:

8. See, for example, the little lecture that Byrnes delivered to the Committee of Three: Minutes of the Committee of Three, 6 November 1945, NARA, RG 59.

9. “W. B.’s Book,” 20 September 1945, Papers of James F. Byrnes, Clemson University Library, Clemson University.

10. Minutes of the Committee of Three, 6 November 1945, NARA, RG 59.

11. Oral History Interview with James W. Riddleberger, April 1972, Harry S. Truman Library.

12. Cloyce K. Huston to John D. Hickerson and H. Freeman Matthews, 24 October 1945, NARA, RG 59, 711.61/10-2445.

13. Barnes to Byrnes, October 29, 1945, *FRUS: 1945*, 4:354-356.

Until the treaties are ratified, the armistice regimes remain in force. As long as they remain in force none of the states subject to them can look forward to a future free from the possibility of interference in every phase in their national life, and interference which by the terms of the armistice other countries are required to recognize and accept.¹⁴

Byrnes said as much the same year in his *Speaking Frankly*, in his address to the nation after the completion of the treaties, and as Trachtenberg grudgingly admits, in his memoirs.¹⁵ Bohlen, in a classified address to officials, spoke openly of what had been conceded to the Soviets – but also of what had not: charges that the United States was “attempting to deny to Russia . . . special interests, based on geography, in Eastern Europe” were simply not true. After reviewing Byrnes’ efforts in 1946, he said,

All the arrangements that the United States has reached, and many they have sought with the Soviet Government, have indicated perfectly clearly we were not attempting to deny to Russia the prerequisites of a great power, namely that she has a certain primary strategic interest in the countries that lie along her borders. It has been the abuse of that right which has caused most of the trouble we have had.¹⁶

By the time of his presentation to the Senate in May 1947, Byrnes’ confidence could not have been great – he had originally hoped to have agreement on the treaties by May 1946 and the Red Army back in the USSR before the end of the year. But his original intentions are quite clear. They were not, as Trachtenberg would have it, to divide the world cleanly in two and then to have as little to do with the Soviets as possible. Speaking to the Committee of Three on November 3, 1945, Byrnes opposed a proposal by the Secretary of War to exclude the Soviets from the occupational regime for Japan, saying “that the trouble is such a step is merely making for two worlds and preparing the course for another war. The Soviets believe that the rest of the world is ganging up on them and he considered it most important for the future peace of the world to work in cooperation with them.”¹⁷

In my article of 1981, I quoted a column by the long-time foreign correspondent of the *Christian Science Monitor*, Joseph C. Harsch, to the effect that in Paris Byrnes was not “trying to challenge a Russian sphere of influence in Eastern Europe. He is only trying to guide and control its development along lines which will not jolt the world into conflict.” Not quite two years after my article appeared, Mr. Harsch contacted me. He said that a colleague had called my article to his attention, and that he wanted to tell me that he was glad to see that a historian had finally got Byrnes’s policy right. He added that he had long thought that Byrnes – whom he had thought the ablest man in Washington – had not

14. U. S. Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, “Hearings before the Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, Eightieth Congress, First Session: Treaties of Peace with Italy, Rumania, Bulgaria, and Hungary” (Washington 1947), 4.

15. Byrnes, *Speaking Frankly*, 154.

16. Charles E. Bohlen, “U. S. Relations with the Curtain States,” 10 July 1947, NARA, RG 59, Records of Charles E. Bohlen, box 6.

17. Minutes of the Committee of Three, 6 November 1945, NARA, RG 59.

received his due for his many services to the country. I asked Harsch what had enabled him to understand Byrnes's policy. With a laugh he said, "Why Byrnes himself and Chip Bohlen explained it to me!" Harsch had long known Byrnes from his years as a reporter; with Bohlen he had become friendly during the war. Harsch added that it was clear to him that Bohlen was Byrnes's chief adviser on matters related to the USSR.¹⁸ (Byrnes described Bohlen in March 1946 as "State's most capable man on everything connected with Russia and the interpretation of Soviet policies."¹⁹)

After I had sent him copies of his columns from 1946 dealing with Byrnes, Harsch called my attention to one that had appeared on June 8, 1946, shortly before the Secretary left for a final session of the Council of Foreign Ministers before the convening of the first session of the Paris CFM. A few days earlier, he had discussed on background with Byrnes and Bohlen the Secretary's plans for Paris. In his report Harsch distilled what he had heard. Byrnes intended to "reverse the deterioration of big power relations into two separate worlds." If Byrnes was successful, the result would "in effect, produce an 'open door' in eastern Europe." He would insist that both Trieste and traffic on the Danube be internationalized and "that Russian troops and largely exclusive Russian influence begin receding from its occupation zones, [and] that commerce begin to flow across the demarcation in Germany." Byrnes "was insisting, in other words, that Russia abandon an exclusive sphere of influence in Eastern Europe." Whether the Soviets would agree to do these things was uncertain. If not, "the western powers would proceed to work their own settlement of western Europe." Harsch recalled that it had seemed to him that Byrnes' principal purpose in the interview was to emphasize that threat. He remembered, too, that Bohlen had stressed that whether the effort in Paris succeeded or failed, the United States had to establish that it had made every effort to meet the legitimate interests of the Soviet Union in Europe before it adopted a more confrontational policy.²⁰

The Larger Context of American Policy in Europe

To maintain his thesis, Professor Trachtenberg must posit that Byrnes operated in a perfect geopolitical vacuum – a vacuum in which there is no trace of the fundamental concerns and perceptions that shaped American policy in Europe. Particularly conspicuous by their absence from Trachtenberg's essay are: (1) American security interests in Europe; (2) the primary reason for concern with Soviet policy in Eastern Europe; (3) the evolution of American thinking about Soviet foreign policy; (4) developments in Eastern Europe that complicated perceptions of Soviet foreign policy and appeared to call into question the viability of Communist rule in certain countries; (5) how the perceived vulnerabilities in

18. Memorandum of conversation with Joseph C. Harsch, 17 May 1983. At the time I spoke with Harsch he had been reporting from Washington for about 50 years. He was to continue for about another decade.

19. Minutes of the Committee of Three, 6 March 1946, NARA, RG 59. Dean Acheson later recalled that Byrnes had "thought of the State Department as himself and Chip Bohlen and Doc Matthews . . ." Interview of Dean Acheson by Hillman, Noyes, and Heller, 16 February 1955, Harry S. Truman Library, Post-Presidential Papers, Memoirs File, box 1.

20. Memorandum of conversation with Joseph C. Harsch, 6 June 1983. *Christian Science Monitor*, 8 June 1946, 1.

the Soviet position in Eastern Europe affected American diplomatic calculations; and (6), the role of Great Britain and other western states both as independent actors and as factors in American calculations.

The interests of the United States in Europe were many, but none was more compelling in the American geopolitical thought of the 1930s and 1940s than the consideration that no single power should control the continent – that, more specifically, there should be no union of Russian power with German. Melvyn Leffler describes the influence of these ideas ably in *A Preponderance of Power*.²¹ This theme the historian encounters in virtually every state paper on the national interest from the “Victory Program” of 1940 through NSC 68 of 1950 and beyond.²² Whether the threat developed from Germany’s conquest of Russia, or the reverse mattered little. As Nicholas Spykman wrote in a singularly influential book in 1943, “a Russian state from the Urals to the North Sea can be no great improvement over a German state from the North Sea to the Urals.”²³ In either case, the result would be an imperium that the United States could not defeat in war and with which it could not compete in peace.

Trachtenberg’s nearest approach to geopolitics is the unremarkable observation that “Western Europe . . . was more valuable than Eastern Europe; Italy, Greece, and Japan counted for more than Poland, Bulgaria, and Romania.”²⁴ He can see no reason why American policymakers should have concerned themselves with Eastern Europe – a region of little *intrinsic* importance – save for the Wilsonian principle of self-determination. And since he finds little influence of that value on policy, he finds it entirely credible that Byrnes should have “written off” Eastern Europe in the interest of a settlement with Moscow as a place of little more interest to the United States than, say, Baluchistan or Patagonia.

Now Trachtenberg is right to suspect that self-determination *per se* was not the primary factor that made Eastern Europe a salient issue for American policymakers. Where he errs, however, is in failing to see that Washington was greatly concerned about how events in Eastern Europe might *resonate elsewhere*. A typical study of March 1944, for example, held that “the form of government in Bulgaria is not a matter of primary significance for the United States.” The country seemed, in fact, “destined for some time to come to have a more or less authoritarian government.” But the United States had to view “with considerable apprehension the establishment of a Soviet-imposed and controlled government” because

21. Leffler, *A Preponderance of Power* (Stanford, 1992), 20-1.

22. Joint Board, “Joint Board Estimate of United States Over-All Production Requirements,” 11 September 1941 in Stephen T. Ross, ed., *American War Plans, 1919-1941*, (New York and London: Garland Publishing Company, 1992), 5: 162; *FRUS, 1950*, 1: 278.

23. Nicholas John Spykman, *America’s Strategy in World Politics: The United States and the Balance of Power*. (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1942) 460. In our time, Melvyn Leffler has offered the best explanation of what the United States had to prevent the Union of German power with Soviet in the introduction to his *A Preponderance of Power*.

24. Trachtenberg, “The United States and Eastern Europe in 1945,” 117.

of “what it would imply in the Balkan region as a whole,” as such an outcome would be “vigorously opposed” by the other Balkan states and Britain.²⁵

Similarly,

Poland’s geographic position in Europe is such that she will necessarily be under strong Russian influence. It is to the interest of the United States that Poland maintain friendly relations with the Soviet Union, but it is also to the interest of this country, as well as to that of Poland, that Russian influence does not become so dominant as to affect international political stability . . .²⁶

Officials appreciated a truth about international affairs that Trachtenberg ignores: that the balance of power is a fundamental organizing principle of the international system – and never more so than when nations differ fundamentally in their values and outlooks. The specific concern in Eastern Europe was that Soviet influence might become so great as to spark the creation of a defensive alliance in Western Europe, probably under British leadership. The continent would thus be divided into two mutually suspicious military blocs – a recipe in American eyes for another war and a danger from which “pulling apart” offered no escape. The danger that American officials foresaw was in essence the Cold War in its basic aspects save one – that it would be the U. S., rather than Britain, that would have to redress the threatening imbalance of power in Europe created by the slavish subordination of Eastern Europe to Moscow.²⁷

President Roosevelt often spoke of the need to serve as an “honest broker” between Britain and the USSR. His press secretary, Jonathan Daniels, recalled, “I definitely gathered that the President felt he was in a position where he had to stand between the British and the Russians in their fears of each other, and that as such he could devise plans of adjustment of their various collisions.”²⁸ The dangers of Anglo-Soviet rivalry feature prominently in wartime policy documents. The Yalta Briefing Book warned of the “power politics scramble for position” in Europe between the British and the Soviets. The State Department inserted into the briefing books for both Yalta and Potsdam a letter from the JCS warning that the “greatest likelihood of eventual conflict between Britain and Russia would seem to grow out of either nation initiating attempts to build up its strength, by seeking to attach to herself parts of Europe to the disadvantage and possible danger of her potential adversary” – the old story, in other words, of rival alliances, arms races, and inevitably, fatal

25. Inter-Divisional Committee on the Balkan-Danubian Region, Policy Summary H-108, “Bulgaria: Political Problems; Future Government of Bulgaria,” 24 March 1944 and H-108 Supplement Preliminary, 27 March 1944, NARA, RG 59, Records of Harley A. Notter, box 154.

26. Policy Committee, Document ECA-9, “Reconstruction of Poland,” 27 October 1944, NARA, RG 59, Records of Harley A. Notter, box 137.

27. American officials almost unanimous failed to foresee how weakened Britain would emerge from the war. John D. Hickerson, chief of the Office of European Affairs during the war, later recalled, “I don’t think anybody on this side of the ocean realized the condition that Western Europe, including Great Britain, was going to be in after the war.” Oral history interview, John D. Hickerson, 1972, Harry S. Truman President Library.

28. Jonathan Daniels, *White House Witness* (Garden City, 1975), 222.

miscalculations, as in 1914. In the strongest language the Chiefs warned of the dangers in the situation: Britain's strength had waned to such an extent that "in a conflict between these two powers the disparity in military strengths they could dispose [in Europe] would under present conditions be far too great to be overcome by our intervention on the side of Britain." The military factors were such that "we might be able to successfully defend Britain, but we could not under existing circumstances defeat Russia."²⁹ The USSR, already dominant in Asia, would then become the master of Eurasia, making Mackinder's "empire of the world" a reality.

The weakness of Britain vis-a-vis the USSR held a special danger in the context of the developing rivalry between the two powers. In March 1946 the Chiefs warned Byrnes and President Truman that the Near Eastern Crisis raised the prospects of both war and the military isolation of the United States. Threatening Soviet inroads in the Near East meant that "Britain must ultimately fight or accept the eventual disintegration of the Empire." That prospect was of the greatest moment to the United States:

The defeat or disintegration of the British Empire would eliminate from Eurasia the last bulwark of resistance between the United States and Soviet expansion. After this the military potential of the United States together with the military potential of possible allies bound to her ideologically might be insufficient to match those of an expanded Soviet Union. Militarily, our present position as a world power is of necessity closely interwoven with that of Great Britain.³⁰

Long before Yalta the United States had cause to fear Anglo-Soviet rivalry. Soviet claims for predominance in Eastern Europe from a point early in the war are familiar and need no rehearsal here. Less familiar, however, are the efforts of the British to organize a countervailing bloc of their own in Western Europe after earlier efforts to foster an Eastern European confederation to contain Soviet influence came a cropper. Publicly, at least, this came to American attention through the famous speech of Field Marshal Jan Christian Smuts in December 1943 in which he called for a close association between Britain and the "small democracies in Western Europe, which, by themselves, may be lost, as they are lost today, and as they may become lost again." The cry was taken up by *The London Times* and, in 1944, by Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden in Parliament.³¹ In August 1944 the Foreign

29. "Liberated Countries," Yalta Briefing Book, *FRUS: The Conferences at Malta and Yalta, 1945*, 102-03; Attachment to "American Policy Towards Spheres of Influence," *FRUS: 1945: The Conferences at Malta and Yalta*, 106-108; Attachment to "British Plan for a Western European Bloc," *FRUS, 1945: Conference of Berlin*, 1: 264-266.

30. Eduard Mark, "The War Scare of 1946 and Its Consequences," *Diplomatic History*, 21, 3 (Summer 1997), 392. It is interesting to note that the same warning in policy and planning documents written when Britain seemed to face defeat in 1940. A case in point is Admiral Stark's famous "Plan Dog Memorandum," for which see Mark A. Stoler, *Allies and Adversaries: The Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Grand Alliance, and U. S. Strategy in World War II* (Chapel Hill, 2000), 29-32.

31. *New York Times*, 3 December 1943, 1; John L. Harper, *American Visions of Europe* (Cambridge and New York, 1994), 213.

Office found that the War Office was already planning for war with Russia.³² The Yalta Briefing Book described at some length the efforts of the British to organize a security sphere in Western Europe.³³ After the war, British policy continued on a course that brought the Treaty of Dunkirk (March 4, 1947) and the Brussels Pact (March 17, 1948). Right after the war, too, there was concern in Washington that Britain was trying to use Germany as a counterpoise to Soviet influence in Europe.³⁴ In 1946 American intelligence reported that the British were organizing an underground, stay-behind organization in Germany for use in a future war with the USSR and supplying aid anti-Soviet partisans in Slovakia and the Western Ukraine.³⁵ Reports also indicated that the British also at least tolerated support of the very large and effective Polish underground by the still-active Polish government-in-exile in London and the Polish Corps of General Anders in Italy.³⁶

The basic postulate of Professor Trachtenberg's essay is that even before the summer of 1945 was out, American officials believed that the Soviet grip on Eastern Europe was so firm that there was no alternative to accepting the situation, "given that the United States was not going to war over the issue . . ."³⁷ He writes, accordingly, "So the Potsdam evidence strongly suggests that by July 1945 at the latest the United States had decided to acquiesce in what the Soviet Union was doing in Poland."³⁸ He similarly interprets Byrnes's proposal at the London CFM that the agreement that Harry Hopkins had worked out for Poland be accepted for Romania and Bulgaria was proof the Secretary was willing to "write off" those countries in September.³⁹ As proof that the adoption of that solution for the two Balkan states at the Moscow CFM in December was recognition of possession of them in fee simple he cites the threat of the representatives in Romania (Burton Y. Berry and Roy M. Melbourne) to resign.⁴⁰

But Berry and Melbourne did not threaten to resign. Berry, while harboring doubts about Soviet good faith, had no objection to the agreement reached at Moscow, which, after all, promised free elections at an early date, freedom of the press, and recognized the democratic character of the "historic parties," which the Romanian Communists had previously denied.⁴¹ Melbourne later recalled, "Berry and I thought that Byrnes' treaty idea

32. This was a source of concern, as the diplomats feared word of the planning might leak out. See Sir Orme Sargent to Anthony Eden, 18 August 1944 and minutes, 18 August 1944, FO371/43306, National Archives, Kew Gardens, UK.

33. "American Policy Toward Spheres of influence," Yalta Briefing Book, *FRUS: The Conferences at Malta and Yalta, 1945*, 103-08.

34. Minutes of the Committee of Three, 16 October 1945, NARA, RG 59.

35. SSU/Germany, cable HEID 962, Crosby Lewis to London, 30 July 1946, *ibid.*, Entry 210, box 468; SSU/Czechoslovakia, Original Report LC-640, 30 April 1946, *ibid.*, Entry 108A, box 29. For more on the British stay-behind organization in Germany, see Richard . Aldrich, *The Hidden Hand: Britain, America, and Cold War Secret Intelligence* (London, 2001), 77.

36. "Special Intelligence Summary No. 14 (4 March 1946), NARA, RG 319, Publications File, 1946-1951, box 1145; annex 3 to *ibid.*, "Conditions in Present-Day Poland."

37. Trachtenberg, "The United States and Eastern Europe in 1945: A Reassessment," 116.

38. *Ibid.*, 103.

39. *Ibid.*, 111-12.

40. *Ibid.*, 114.

41. Diary of Roy M. Melbourne, 30 December 1945, Lilly Library, Indiana University.

might just work, given the unpopularity of the Rumanian Communists and all the trouble the country was causing the Russians. You should remember, besides, that at this time [early to mid-1946] Soviet motives were still something of an open question. So it not seem out of the question that the German treaty and the various guarantees in the treaties [for the German satellites] and so on might cause the Russians to relent somewhat.”⁴² Maynard Barnes in Bulgaria was almost stridently critical of the Moscow agreement at first. But when in June the Soviets agreed to a draft treaty for Bulgaria requiring the evacuation of their forces within 60 days, he hastened to congratulate Byrnes, adding that “Opposition leaders have for some time now accepted the force of the contention that [the] benefits to all of [a] treaty providing for withdrawal of Russian troops would in [the] end far exceed any momentary advantage for [the] Opposition to be gained by carrying policy of non-recognition to [the] extreme of refusing to sign satisfactory treaty with [the] Government . . .”⁴³

What Professor Trachtenberg believes about American perceptions of the situation in Eastern Europe is no more correct than his assertion about the response of Berry and Melbourne to the Moscow CFM. It seemed to Byrnes and other officials that east of the Elbe there might be a course open to them between the stark alternatives that my distinguished colleague posits -- capitulation and war. That hope arose from the belief that the Soviets, whatever their plans might originally have been, had likely come to realize that they had bitten off more than they could chew in Eastern Europe. It seemed, accordingly, that they might welcome American assistance in achieving a postwar settlement that would enable them to climb down from any attempt at complete domination while still securing their essential security interests in Eastern Europe and preserving the wartime alliance. It was Byrnes’s object to give Moscow that chance.

After the London Conference W. A. Harriman toured Eastern Europe before returning to his embassy in Moscow. Upon his return he offered the staff a *tour d’horizon* that caught the prevailing American perceptions of the situation in the region. He began by saying “The Soviet Government realizes they are so weak in Rumania that they need the United States’s approval of what they are doing in order successfully to carry out their program.” (This inspired George F. Kennan to say in the question period, “As far as Rumania is concerned, we need only sit tight.”) The ambassador then developed his major points:

I have felt for a long time that the moral force of the United States is something the Soviet Government needs. . . I emphasize this because it seems to me to be conclusive. In the Soviet foreign policy it has long been clear the politics they have been working on are meeting with very serious difficulties. They difficulties in neighboring countries which they wish to dominate have been increased by the undisciplined nature of the behavior or the Red Army occupation forces and their generally ruthless political moves. When they dissolved the Comintern they adopted in each country a social-political-economic program and by so doing hoped to form left wing blocs to be dominated by communist groups. That plan (which was very plausible)

42. Roy M. Melbourne to Eduard Mark, 12 April 1988.

43. Barnes to Byrnes, 21 June 1946, *FRUS, 1946*, 6:106.

and which, frankly, I thought they would make successful) is failing everywhere.⁴⁴

Similarly, Charles W. Thayer, the diplomat and Soviet expert serving as head of the Strategic Services Unit's station in Austria, was of the opinion in December 1945 after a tour of Eastern Europe that "Communism appears to be definitely on the wane in Austria, Hungary, Germany and Czechoslovakia," adding that he thought that the Soviets were "beginning to appreciate this fact and are getting ready to trim their sails accordingly."⁴⁵

The many reports that Washington had in late 1945 of the weakness of the Soviet position in Eastern Europe find no place in Trachtenberg's essay. With the exception of Czechoslovakia, there was throughout the region a spontaneous rejection of the Communists as Russian stooges. The reports of widespread political dissatisfaction with the Soviet presence are to be found in the reports of diplomats and journalists of all countries and are familiar. But there were other reports as well, which have yet to figure much in the historiography of the Cold War. Much of Eastern Europe was a seething cauldron of unrest, much of it violent. Even the Soviet Union itself was not exempt from upheaval.⁴⁶

About the unrest in the USSR and in Eastern Europe the United States Government was quite well informed. The SSU was in contact with the Polish, Ukrainian, and Estonian partisans, even supplying a limited quantity of arms to the latter. It also sent agents into Poland to report directly, and knew of the underground movement taking shape in Latvia, Estonia, Slovakia, Yugoslavia, and Romania (In July 1946 the Central Intelligence Group would ally itself with the Romanian organization in the first fully fledged paramilitary operation of the Cold War). Reports on the underground movements were also received from Swedish agents working under cover of the Red Cross and British's SIS, Italy's *SIM*, and France's *DGER*. Bohlen followed these reports closely, often visiting the SSU's headquarters on Washington's E Street Northwest to read the latest products.⁴⁷ Significantly, estimates of the potency of the undergrounds increased steadily for about a year after the summer of 1945. Poland is a case in point. In September 1945 the OSS, as Trachtenberg notes, appraised the newly formed Polish Provisional Government as "considerably stronger" than its predecessor "and more capable of establishing firmly the

44. "Ambassador's Staff Conference," 10 October 1945, Harriman Papers, Library of Congress, box 183. Harper is good on Kennan's view of the weakness of the Soviet position in this period: *American Visions of Europe*, 201-02

45. Diary General C. V. R. Schuyler, 27 December 1945, Schuyler Papers, Library of Congress. The SSU was the successor to the wartime OSS. Schuyler was the American delegate to the Allied Control Commission for Romania.

46. For an impressive review of unrest in the USSR, see Alfred J. Rieber, "Civil Wars in the Soviet Union," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 4(Winter 2003): 129-62.

47. David Alvarez and I treat all these matters at length in our forthcoming *As Though A Glass Darkly: American Intelligence and European Communism, 1944-1947*. I learned of Bohlen's visits to the SSU's headquarters from Lt. General William Quinn, who as a colonel had directed the SSU in 1946. Interview of General Quinn by Eduard Mark, 19 October 1993. I have since noted that the initials "CEB" are to be found on the cover sheets of the SSU's reports - especially those dealing with Germany.

foreign and domestic policies initiated by the Lublin regime.”⁴⁸ Before long, however, it had become fairly obvious that the resistance has become sufficiently formidable to pose a threat to the consolidation of Communist rule in Poland. In December 1945 Swedish intelligence advised the Americans that no more than 15 percent of Poles supported the government: “Workmen and peasants are against Russia. There is a highly organized resistance movement with a growing membership. Intelligent Poles often remark, ‘give us the Germans back’ . . .” For the time being it was lying low, but was believed “to be extremely well armed One hears the whispered threat everywhere – ‘Wait until spring!’”⁴⁹

In March 1946 U. S. European Command prepared perhaps the first comprehensive report on the Polish partisans. The two principal organizations, according to the report, were the wartime *Armja Krajowa* in reconstituted form and the *Narodowe Siły Zbrojne* (NSZ - National Armed Forces). The AK was perhaps even more powerful than it had been during the war when it was reputedly the strongest underground movement in Europe: it possessed “motorized equipment in great strength, tanks, guns and the latest models of small arms, most of foreign origin.” Turning to the question of what made the astonishing strength of the AK possible, EUCOM opined, “there cannot be a single doubt that the overall directives, the supply of funds and the propaganda come from abroad. Namely from the ex-Government in exile in ENGLAND.” The future promised only conflict because “the present Government is unpopular and too weak to take efficient measures to combat the ever increasing activities of the well-organized and equipped underground forces in POLAND.” The report noted that Poland’s Vice Premier had recently stated in Parliament that the partisans had routed even the armored formations sent against them.⁵⁰

In Romania the situation was perhaps even more dire for the Soviets. Local commandants began to report the formation of an armed underground as early as 1944.⁵¹ Thousands of Soviet deserters also roamed the Romanian countryside, forming themselves into bands and sometimes making common cause with the Romanian partisans.⁵² Toward the end of 1944 the Soviets discovered a major conspiracy in the Romanian Army to return Romania

48. Major General William J. Donovan to Rose Conway, 5 September 1945, enclosing “Memorandum for the President,” NARA, R.R. 226, Entry 162, Box 9.

49. Unaddressed memorandum by LIMIT, 4 January 1946, subj: “Poland,” NARA, RG 226, Entry 210, box 503. LIMIT was the codename for the station chief in Stockholm.

50. “Special Intelligence Summary No. 14 (4 March 1946), NARA, RG 319, Publications File, 1946-1951, box 1145; annex 3 to *ibid*, “Conditions in Present-Day Poland.”

51. The commandant in Craiova, for example: Voroshilov to the Chief of the Staff of the ACC in Romania, Major General Comrade Vasil’ev, 26 October 1944, Foreign Policy Archive of the Russian Federation, f. 454, o. 1, d. 10, p. 84,

52. From a Soviet report on conditions in Ara: “Having studied these actions of our soldiers and officers, the enemy draws into his work individual soldiers and even officers, creates detachments of bandits from our deserters and Romanian soldiers (of whom there are many in the district) and they engage in murder, robbery, discrediting the Red Army. The actions, or rather the freedom of action of the deserters, becomes easier for them because they have not met with action against them. The presence in this district of a large number of deserters, spies, and diversionists is explained by the fact that the region is on the border and affords a many opportunities for hiding.” Senior Lieutenant Pukerman to the Major General V. V. Vasil’ev, 16 December 1944, Foreign Policy Archive of the Russian Federation, , f. 454, o. 1, d. 10, p. 84, l. 38..

to the side of Germany; before long signals intelligence revealed the “historic parties” backed by the United States were deeply implicated.⁵³ By early 1946 bands of guerilla openly roamed parts of the country. Lt. Ira C. Hamilton of the SSU had the mission of establishing contact with them. He later recalled his meeting with the leader of one band, in circumstances that suggest much about the state of Romania:

I met Olteanu in Bistrița, which is where the story of Dracula starts, you know. And it was during the noon hour, and I was having lunch at a café in the sidewalk portion in the town square there. And, all of a sudden, the whole town became deathly silent and this strange-looking character came toward me from a side street, and he was wearing crossed bandoleers. For God’s sake, it looked like Pancho Villa. And, ah, he came and introduced himself, and it was this man Olteanu, who’s the guerilla leader in Bukovina.⁵⁴

By early 1947 the Romanian National Peasant Party believed that its underground formations were strong enough to overturn the pro-Soviet government of Petru Groza.⁵⁵ Through this period the intelligence reports sent to Stalin steadily detail armed clashes – some of a large scale – in many areas of Eastern Europe and the eastern USSR.⁵⁶

In intensely nationalistic Romania, moreover, there was also a special circumstance well-known to American officials: the Romanian Communist Party was not monolithic. Numbers of Romanian Communists were opposed to the oppressive relationship developing between their country and the USSR. The leading member of this group was the charismatic minister of justice, Lucretziu Pătrășcanu, the only Communist to enjoy popularity with the public at large. Not only was Pătrășcanu in contact with the opposition, but he and the Communists’ leading economist, Herbert Zilber, supplied what was arguably the best intelligence the United States had on political developments in Romania.⁵⁷

53. I discussed this event briefly in my review of Wilson Miscamble’s *From Roosevelt to Truman: Potsdam, Hiroshima and the Cold War* (2007). David Alvarez and I present the details in our *As Through a Glass Darkly*. Significantly, officials in Washington – but not the diplomats in Bucharest – knew about the conspiracy from intercepted German communications that received only limited distribution. For a good introduction to the German side of the affaire, see Perry Biddiscombe, “Prodding the Russian Bear: Pro-German Resistance in Romania, 1944-5,” *European History Quarterly*, 23 (1993), 193-232. Most of the details that Biddiscombe drew from German records were known to Anglo-American intelligence through intercepted signals.

54. Interview of Ira C. Hamilton by Eduard Mark, Albuquerque, New Mexico, 17 October 1987.

55. Brigadier General E. K. Wright to President Truman, 20 March 1947, subj: “Memorandum for the President,” NARA, RG 218, Chairman’s File (Admiral Leahy), box 19. For a comprehensive Soviet report on the Romanian underground, see “Otchët otноситel’no anketyi Ministerstva Inostranniyx Del,” n.d. but cataloged by the MID on 26 August 1947, Foreign Policy Archive of the Russian Federation, f. 125, f. 65, p. 142, o. 35, 1847, 9-84.

56. For some such reports from the period under discussion, see *Lubyanka: Stalin i NKVD-NKGB-GUKR “Smersh”, 1939 - Mart 1946*, ed. V. N. Xhaystov, B. L. Naumov, and N. C. Plotnikova (Moscow, 2006), 410-13, 443-46, 447-48, 467-74, 475-77, 478-80, 486-90, 498-99, 500-01, 506-07, 512-15, 537-38, 539, 540, 552-60.

57. I dealt with these matters some years ago in an article based on the information available c. 1990: “The OSS in Romania, 1944-45: An Intelligence Operation of the Early Cold War.” *Intelligence and National*

In sum, from the Baltic Sea to the Adriatic, Moscow confronted a sea of problems that rendered questionable its ability to effect a complete and permanent political consolidation. Strident nationalism had almost everywhere doomed the strategy of forming coalition governments dominated by Communists yet able to win majority support. In Poland, Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania, the Ukraine, Belorussia, Slovakia, Yugoslavia and Romania armed resistance had appeared and waxed strong. The USSR's own need to reconstruct precluded economic aid to its turbulent marches. At the same time, Moscow's attempts to control the vast arc of chaos endangered the aid and trade it wanted from the West and the alliance it wanted to preserve. It was not unreasonable to hope, as Byrnes and Bohlen did, that the Soviets might settle for less onerous forms of control more acceptable to their allies. Trachtenberg's error is his assumption that since the United States was neither willing nor able to *force* the Soviets from Eastern Europe, there was no alternative to "writing it off."⁵⁸ But there was, it seemed, another alternative: to wait for the *Soviets themselves* to conclude that the cost of dominating the region was too great. The *only* American diplomat ever to suggest that the United States abandon Eastern Europe as beyond its ability to influence was not James F. Byrnes but George F. Kennan, in February 1945. But by May 1945 the march of events had convinced him that "Russia will not have an easy time in maintaining the power which it has seized over other peoples in Eastern and Central Europe unless it receives both moral and material assistance from the West."⁵⁹ Not surprising, Kennan became before long the leading advocate of covert paramilitary operations in Eastern Europe and even in the USSR itself.⁶⁰

Professor Trachtenberg's failure to take into account the difficulties the Soviet faced in Eastern Europe is the most basic of the reasons for his misunderstanding of American policy toward the region. But he also fails to see that the relatively liberal policies the Soviets adopted in Austria, Finland, Czechoslovakia and (for a while) Hungary offered hope that they might relent somewhat in the nations where they had met with determined and even effective resistance. And there is yet another important dimension of the American perception of developments in Poland and Romania that Trachtenberg fails to take into consideration. Informed American officials in Washington had a certain tolerance for the Soviet crackdown in Romania in March 1945 because they knew from the intercepts of German communications – a form of intelligence not disseminated to diplomats in the field – that elements of the Romanian army and of the nominally democratic "historic" parties had conspired with the Germans in late 1944 and early 1945 to bring the country back to

Security, 9 (April 1994), 320-344. In *As Through A Glass Darkly*, David Alvarez and I will provide a much more complete account.

58. The U.S., Trachtenberg has written, recognized the Communist-dominated interim regimes in Bulgaria and Romania because "short of going to war, the United States had no choice but to accept Soviet control of the area." *A Constructed Peace*, 14.

59. Harper, *American Visions of Europe*, 187, 189.

60. Assuming that the passages in question survive declassification review, my forthcoming "*A Gloomier Peace*," will provide overviews of both covert operations in Eastern Europe and Kennan's decisive role in bring them about in spite of the opposition of the CIA, which thought in 1949 the potential for successful armed resistance in Eastern Europe no longer existed. Kennan, the principal author of NSC 20/4, was not deterred.

Axis. Andreï Vysinshinskiĭ's famous visit to Bucharest was in response to the discovery of the plot.⁶¹ American officials understood, moreover, that the anti-Soviet resistance in Poland did not consist entirely of simon-pure democrats. Referring to the two principle underground organizations, an intelligence report of March, 1946 based on the SSU's direct contacts with the groups noted, "Although the NSZ still is maintained as a separate organization, a clear distinction between the AK and NSZ cannot be verified. Because their aims and objectives have become the same: Elimination of the Jews, Russians, Communists, and the establishment of a strong anti-Soviet nationalistic POLAND on fascist principles."⁶² The knowledge that some of the harsher Soviet actions were not entirely unprovoked likely encouraged for a while the belief in Washington that Soviet policy was not necessarily intrinsically aggressive, especially in view of the moderate policies pursued in some other countries.

Byrnes's Policy Towards Eastern Europe: Development And Implementation

The failure of the London CFM – the conferees had not even been able to agree on a communiqué – had been so complete that it could hardly fail to inspire reconsideration in Washington. Molotov had gone out of his way to persuade Byrnes that he was not cowed by the recent use of atomic bombs, would not truckle for economic aid, and did not care whether the U. S. recognized Romania and Bulgaria or not.⁶³ Nor did Molotov seem daunted when Byrnes lost his famous temper and began to yell at his Soviet counterpart in a private meeting.⁶⁴

During one particularly bad moment in London Byrnes said to a friend that he saw no solution to the problem of Russia, but added, "We must find one."⁶⁵ The official whom Byrnes regarded as "State's most capable man on everything connected with Russia" – suggested a way out of the impasse. In a memorandum of October 18, 1945, drafted on the Secretary's own stationary, Bohlen observed that Soviet policies in Eastern Europe were leading to "increasing friction with the Western Democracies and the eventual division as a last resort of the world into spheres of influence in the most undesirable and dangerous sense of that term." These developments threatened both the success of the United Nations "and the formation of the world into an armed camp in preparation for the next world war." The United States, accordingly, "should not and indeed could not assist or even acquiesce in the establishment by the Soviet Union of exclusive spheres of influence in Central and

61. David Alvarez and I discuss this in our forthcoming *As Through A Glass Darkly*. I discussed the subject briefly in my review of Miscamble's *From Roosevelt to Truman* (archived at <http://www.h-net.org/~diplo/roundtables/PDF/FromTrumantoRoosevelt-Mark.pdf>).

62. "Special Intelligence Summary No. 14 (4 March 1946), NARA, RG 319, Publications File, 1946-1951, box 1145; annex 3 to *ibid*, "Conditions in Present-Day Poland."

63. The interim government of Hungary had been recognized in August as Washington deemed it sufficiently representative.

64. "W. B.'s Book," 20 September 1946, Papers of James F. Byrnes, Clemson University Library, Clemson University.

65. *Ibid.*, September 16.

Eastern Europe by means of complete domination of the lives of the countries lying in that region . . .”⁶⁶

Now, had Byrnes been willing – as Trachtenberg supposes – “to live with a Soviet-dominated Eastern Europe” in which the regimes were “instruments of Soviet control” – it is hardly likely that his chief adviser on the USSR would have so confidently assumed that a Soviet “exclusive sphere of influence” there was simply and self-evidently unacceptable. But neither did Bohlen reject *any* form of Soviet influence over Eastern Europe. Writing in the spirit of what I called “great-power chauvinism” in my article of 1981, Bohlen argued that the Soviets had to be made to understand the difference “between a fair and reasonable definition of legitimate influence on the part of a great power . . . and the illegitimate extension of such interest in the direction of domination and absolute control.” There was “an excellent precedent in our present relationship with the Latin American countries.” While

we do claim the right of the United States to have a guiding voice in a certain limited sphere of the foreign relations of those countries, we do not attempt on the basis of that right to dictate their internal life or too restrict their intercourse with foreign nations except in that limited sphere. This sphere might be roughly defined as the politico-strategic aspect of their foreign relations.

While the U. S. would “oppose or even forbid the conclusion of military alliances and political alliances between a Latin America state and a European or Asiatic power,” it did not “prevent normal trade, cultural exchange and other normal international intercourse.” The Soviets, Bohlen concluded, were entitled to as much in Eastern Europe. But – *pace* Professor Trachtenberg – the U.S. had “to oppose any extension of this influence into illegitimate fields leading towards the establishment of a rigidly and exclusively Soviet-controlled bloc.” A conciliatory policy of education, if “consistent, patient, and firm,” offered “perhaps the best hope of strengthening the elements in the Soviet government who if given an opportunity to do so would favor a modification of the present Soviet attempts at domination in Eastern and Central Europe . . .” Perhaps, too, the Soviets would note that “Soviet-Finnish relations are on a sounder footing for the future even from the Soviet point of view than the relations with the other bordering countries where the same restraint has not been shown.”⁶⁷

On October 24-25, Harriman visited Stalin at his retreat in Georgia and there had an epiphany. He came away convinced that in fact Japan was Stalin’s chief concern and that

66. I have published Bohlen’s memorandum and urge readers interested in the present debate to read it: “Charles E. Bohlen and the Acceptable Limits of Soviet Hegemony in Eastern Europe: A Memorandum of 18 October 1945, *Diplomatic History*, 3 (Spring, 79), 313-36.

67. *Ibid.* In this passage Bohlen reflected a view, common at the time, that there were elements in the Soviet Government favoring cooperation with the U. S. as well as opponents of cooperation. Molotov was usually said to be the head of the latter, Stalin for the former. Bohlen also drew freely upon wartime thinking about what the United States could accept in the way of Soviet predominance in Eastern Europe, as I explained in my article of 1981.

recognition of the interim regimes was at best a secondary concern. Byrnes had thought that Molotov had been bluffing in London when belittled the importance of recognition. But he now accepted Harriman's reinterpretation of Soviet policy.⁶⁸

On October 31 Byrnes gave a speech significantly entitled, "Neighboring Nations in One World." It was, he later recalled, "directed largely toward the Kremlin."⁶⁹ Closely following Bohlen's memo, the Secretary invoked the example of the Good Neighbor Policy, albeit somewhat more tactfully than Bohlen had done: "In the Inter-American system the members do not interfere in the internal affairs of their neighbors nor do they brook interference in those internal affairs by others." Americans, proud of "the evolution of the good neighbor policy," could "not deny to other nations the right to develop such a policy." Thus the U. S., "fully aware" of the USSR's "special security interests" in Eastern Europe, had "sympathized with the efforts of the Soviet Union to draw into close and more friendly association" with her neighbors, as witness the "arrangements made for the occupation and control of the former enemy states." Americans, Byrnes continued, fully sympathized with "the determination of the people of the Soviet Union that never again will they tolerate the pursuit of policy in those countries directed against the Soviet Union's security and way of life." But, he warned, regional security agreements had to respect "the rights and interests of other States and fit into the world system" because "we live in one world, and in this atomic age regional isolationism is even more dangerous than is national isolationism." Eastern Europe, in short, had to be open to what Bohlen had called "normal international intercourse" even though it was a region in which the USSR had "special security interests."⁷⁰ Byrnes' address was not an exercise in public relations. In June 1946 the State Department's USSR Committee treated it as *the* definitive statement of policy toward Eastern Europe.⁷¹

Byrnes restated his position on February 28, 1946, warning against efforts to divide "the world into exclusive blocs or spheres of influence. In the atomic age we will not seek to divide a world which is one and indivisible." After declaring that "we have openly, gladly, and whole-heartedly welcomed our Soviet ally as a great power second to none," as shown by the "many adjustments in her favor . . .", he went on to say pointedly that no nation should "unduly prolong the making of peace and continue to impose . . . troops upon small

68. Byrnes, *Speaking Frankly*, 108; Minutes of the Committee of Three, 6 November 1945, NARA, RG 59.

69. Byrnes, *Speaking Frankly*, 108.

70. *The New York Times*, 1 November 1945, 4.

71. Minutes of the U.S.S.R. Committee, 26 June 1946, NARA, RG 59, Records of the Interdepartmental and Intradepartmental Committees of the Department of State, box 16. The committee approved guidance for economic negotiations with the USSR involving Eastern Europe. The document opened with these words which quoted Byrnes "The United States has 'recognized Russia's special security interests' in . . . her Central and Eastern European neighbors, [but] we do not concede that the economies of any of these countries are for this reason to be directed primarily in what Russia may conceive to be her interest." It went on to assert that it was the purpose of the U. S. to effect whole changes in the economic agreements that Moscow had concluded with its neighbors. USSR Area Committee, "Proposals to be made by The United States to The U. S. S. R. During The Loan Negotiations Concerning European Reconstruction," 2 July 1946, NARA, RG 353, Country Committee Files, box 15.

and impoverished states.⁷² As it happened, King Mihai of Romania had asked for a statement of American policy toward his country. The sentence just quoted formed the core of Byrnes' assurance of American support.⁷³

Neither Byrnes' public addresses nor Bohlen's secret memo can be interpreted as endorsing "a Soviet-dominated Eastern Europe" in which "Communist regimes that were the instruments of Soviet control there."⁷⁴ Trachtenberg mentions none of them. He does, however, cite the recognition of the Bulgarian and Romanian interim governments pursuant to the agreements of the Moscow CFM as proof of his thesis. But, as Byrnes himself had repeatedly said, peace treaties could not be signed with unrecognized governments. Once the policy of non-recognition had been discredited, the refusal to recognize the interim governments of Bulgaria and Romania became an obstacle to expediting the withdrawal of Soviet forces from Eastern Europe. Hence Byrnes's willingness to do what he had refused to do at London – to agree to recognize the interim governments of Romania and Bulgaria after the addition of two members of the opposition to the cabinets. The changes contemplated were, to be sure, cosmetic. But Byrnes' primary object was no longer to change the composition of the interim governments; it was to remove an obstacle to the early conclusion of peace treaties – his plan was to complete the instruments before summer 1946 in order to prevent the riveting of communist-dominated regimes on Eastern Europe.

At the Paris CFM and the Paris Peace Conference, and the New York CFM of 1946 Byrnes pursued the evolution of the developing Soviet exclusive sphere that Trachtenberg has admitted that the Secretary preferred as a solution in the abstract.⁷⁵ His appeal was to the enlightened self-interest of the Soviet leadership. His operational assumption was the USSR functioned as a national state rather than the embodiment of a revolutionary cause. He hoped to persuade the Soviets that they had embarked on a course that had made their often-professed fears of a world aligned against them a self-fulfilling prophecy.⁷⁶ Throughout 1946 Byrnes labored to institutionalize an open sphere of influence in Eastern Europe. Taken with the treaties of mutual assistance the Soviets had already concluded with most of the Eastern European states, the treaty of demilitarization for Germany that Byrnes repeatedly offered Moscow would have guaranteed Soviet military superiority on

72. Speech before the Overseas Press Club, *New York Times*, 1 March 1946, 10.

73. *FRUS*, 1946, 6, 581.

74. In fact, *The New York Times* put the following headline above the text of the speech: "Byrnes Issues War Warning Against Spheres of Influence."

75. "My own view is that while an 'open sphere' was for Byrnes and most American policymakers the optimal solution, they did not really think that it was within reach; and that Byrnes, in particular, accepted realities for what they were, was willing in effect to accept total Soviet domination of the area." *A Constructed Peace*, 14, no. 31.

76. After the London CFM, Byrnes had marveled that Molotov had pushed France, Britain, and China into "the lap of the U.S. 'All they want to know is what we want because Molotov has caused them to fear Russia.'" He was to write in 1947 that it was "little short of a tragedy" that the Soviet Union should have sacrificed the "deposit of good will, as great, if not greater, than that of any other country" that it enjoyed in the United States. "W.B.'s Book," September 20, 1945, folder 602, Papers of James F. Byrnes Papers, Clemson University Library; Byrnes, *Speaking Frankly*, 71.

the continent. The treaties contained promises of domestic self-determination, they also banned virtually every group to which the Soviets might reasonably object, as well as anti-Soviet propaganda, thus giving the USSR a legal basis for interventions in states whose armed forces the treaties limited to low levels. Byrnes was not very successful in his main goal – to secure the speedy departure of Soviet troops. He had hoped to conclude the treaties by early summer. They were not finished until December, and they contained provisions entitling the Soviets to maintain garrisons in Hungary and Romania to protect supply lines to Austria. Molotov's delaying of the treaties had allowed the Soviets to invest the Communist-dominated interim governments with sufficient police power to preserve themselves against armed resistance and popular hostility.

How long Byrnes continued to believe that it would be possible to achieve the withdrawal of Soviet forces from the former German satellites before the Communist-dominated interim regimes put down roots is uncertain. He appeared upbeat in his presentation to the Senate in May 1947 – but the situation demanded that. Harsch recalled that Byrnes and Bohlen seemed to him notably less confident after the difficult summer meeting in Paris than they had been before. In the collection of his columns that I that sent him, he directed my attention to one that appeared in September that appears to indicate that Byrnes was less confident of success than he had been in June, although Harsch could not recall whether it had been directly based on talks with Byrnes or Bohlen, as his column of June had been.⁷⁷

Summary

Professor Trachtenberg's thesis is that Secretary of States James F. Byrnes made it clear that the United States "was willing to live with a Soviet-dominated Eastern Europe— that it would be willing to live with the Communist regimes that were the instruments of Soviet control there." The problems with this assertion are numerous and insuperable. The hypothesis defies what Byrnes said repeatedly in public and private about his own policies. It disregards the testimony of the Secretary's closest advisers about the initiatives that they helped to formulate. It ignores virtually all the specifics of Byrnes's policy, including even its centerpiece, the treaty for the demilitarization of Germany that the Secretary offered to the Soviets at London, at Moscow, and then again in Paris as part of his effort to effect an early withdrawal of Soviet forces from Eastern Europe. It posits, untenably, that American diplomats were by the end of 1945 altogether convinced that the Soviets wanted an exclusive sphere of satrapies when there were still plausible grounds for thinking otherwise. It ignores that Soviet policy differed from one country to another and that there could be no certainty in 1945 whether Poland and Romania were better indexes of Soviet intentions than Finland and Hungary. It does not take into account recently declassified information that shows Washington had grounds for believing that at least one of the most dramatic Soviet interventions – Romania in March 1945-- had been forced by military necessity. It ignores, root and branch, the entire geopolitical basis of American policy as it had developed through a decade and half of war, crises and technological revolution. In

77. Memorandum of conversation of Joseph C. Harsch, 8 June 1983; *Christian Science Monitor*, 18 September 1946, 9.

hypothesizing a grand offer to divide the world it supposes that the United States was as free to operate on behalf of Britain and France as Moscow was for Germany's defeated and occupied East European satellites. The thesis presumes as well that a deal so transparently squalid could have been sold to Congress, the public, or even to the staff of the Department of State, which would have leaked it to the press in a trice. Professor Trachtenberg, in sum, has leapt through the looking glass into a phantasmagoric parallel universe where history's actors may have familiar names but play out a script known only to their chimerical realm.

Marc Trachtenberg's article in *Journal of Cold War Studies* delivers exactly what the title promises: a substantial and important reassessment of American policy toward Eastern Europe in 1945. One might think that there is little left to be said on this subject after several decades of research and intense debate, but Trachtenberg's article advances an interpretation of James Byrnes and American policy toward Eastern Europe that implicitly and explicitly departs from previous research. In his view, Byrnes had a strategic vision and a "guiding philosophy" that he is almost always held to lack by historians. Far from being a staunch opponent of a peace based on spheres of influence, Trachtenberg argues that Byrnes sought throughout 1945 to work out a European settlement based on an acceptance by both sides of their respective spheres of influence. While the core of his argument can be found in *A Constructed Peace: The Making of the European Settlement 1945-1963*, his article in *JCWS* offers a detailed account of the diplomacy over Eastern Europe from Potsdam to the Moscow Conference of 1945 that is largely absent from the book.¹

The best place to start an analysis of Trachtenberg's article is with his provocative assessment of Byrnes. Historians of the Cold War have rarely been kind to Truman's Secretary of State. Revisionist scholars such as Gar Alperovitz have taken him to task for allegedly being the principal architect of a policy of "atomic diplomacy." Other scholars, such as Carolyn Eisenberg, have criticized Byrnes for taking a hard line on questions related to German reparations at Potsdam. In both cases, Byrnes is criticized for supposedly reversing FDR's policy of cooperation with the Soviet Union. However, despite these criticisms from revisionist historians, Byrnes has also been harshly criticized by orthodox historians of the Cold War. For example, in his recent account of the origins of the Cold War, Wilson Miscamble is largely critical of Byrnes precisely because of his alleged efforts to continue the main directions of FDR's Soviet policy. The roots of the orthodox critique of Byrnes can largely be traced back to George Kennan's influential portrait of Byrnes in the first volume of his memoirs. Like Miscamble, Kennan was critical of Byrnes for his alleged devotion to FDR's policies, but even more because of his entire approach to issues of American foreign policy. According to Kennan, Byrnes "plays his negotiations by ear, going into them with no clear or fixed plan, with no definite set objectives, or limitations...his main purpose is to achieve some sort of agreement, he doesn't much care what...He wants an agreement for its political effect at home. The Russians know this. They will see that for this superficial success he pays a heavy price in the things that are real."²

Was Byrnes a hardliner, an appeaser, or simply someone who had no fixed plans or strategy at all when it came to the nature and structure of the postwar world? What

¹ Marc Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace: The Making of the European Settlement 1945-1963* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999). I should note that I read an early draft of Trachtenberg's article prior to publication.

² George Kennan, *Memoirs 1925-50* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1967), pp.287-288. For Miscamble's insightful critique of Byrnes and Truman, see Wilson D. Miscamble, *From Roosevelt to Truman: Potsdam, Hiroshima, and the Cold War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

Trachtenberg demonstrates in his article is that these very questions and categories for thinking about Byrnes are either wrong or incomplete. To understand Byrnes's vision and diplomacy, it is imperative to understand his approach to the most important question of the postwar world: the future of Germany. Such a statement might seem obvious to a reader of Trachtenberg's article or *A Constructed Peace*, but it is simply remarkable to note how inadequately many historians have understood Byrnes's approach to the German question at Potsdam. Indeed, neither Robert Messer nor James Robertson, in their otherwise excellent biographies of Byrnes, devote even a single word to examining his diplomacy over the German question at Potsdam.³ What Byrnes did at Potsdam was unfathomable even to such normally astute observers as Kennan. In his memoirs, drawn from his impressions in the summer of 1945. Kennan wrote that the entire framework of Potsdam as it related to Germany was "unreal and unworkable" because "the idea of a Germany run jointly with the Russians is a chimera." A wise American policy towards Germany and Europe, according to Kennan, needed to be based on the fact that Germany had already been effectively divided.⁴

The great irony of Kennan's mistaken assessment, as Trachtenberg demonstrates, is that it was Byrnes who operated on assumptions virtually identical to Kennan's at Potsdam. Everyone arrived at the conference with the idea that the ultimate goal was to work out a reparations settlement that would result in Germany being run as a single economic unit. American and British insistence on the "first-charge principle" was based on the idea that reparations would be assessed and provided to the Soviet Union only after all of the great powers worked out inherently complicated plans for running the entire German economy. Even though the Soviets showed a clear willingness to negotiate a lower fixed amount of reparations, Byrnes chose not to make a deal on the basis of a common plan. His zonal reparations plan was based on a Kennanesque logic: the Soviets would have a free hand in their zone and the Western powers would have a free hand in their zones. British negotiators at Potsdam knew exactly what Byrnes was doing and they understood the larger implications of his zonal reparations plan. As David Waley, the lead Treasury official concerned with the reparations issue at Potsdam, noted during the conference: "the Russian zone will inevitably be treated as a separate economic unit and that however undesirable it may be to draw a line across the middle of Germany, this is bound to happen and it is unrealistic to make a bargain except on a basis that assumes it will happen."⁵ Waley made his argument directly to Byrnes in the closing days of the Potsdam Conference:

I did my best to convince Byrnes that his system of swaps is utterly inconsistent with the idea of treating Germany as a single economic unit. I said that the peasant in Brandenburg who sells his potatoes to Berlin has to be paid by receiving boots and shoes from Berlin and cannot be paid by Russia receiving a steel plant. I pointed out that if a line is drawn across the

³ See Robert L. Messer, *The End of an Alliance: James F. Byrnes, Roosevelt, Truman, and the Origins of the Cold War* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1982); and David Robertson, *Sly and Able: A Political Biography of James F. Byrnes* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1994).

⁴ Kennan, *Memoirs 1925-1950*, p.258.

⁵ Memorandum by Sir David Waley, August 2, 1945, in *Documents on British Policy Overseas*, series 1, volume 1, *The Conference at Potsdam, 1945* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1984), p.1259.

middle of Europe, so that there is a frontier with Russia on one side and the Western powers on the other side, this has an importance far transcending reparations.⁶

Byrnes was well aware of what he was doing at Potsdam. His stance on Germany was guided by the same premise held by Kennan; namely, that the Western powers and the Soviet Union would not be able to cooperate and organize a united Germany acceptable to all sides. If all Byrnes cared about was reaching an agreement for the sake of an agreement, he probably could have brokered a unified reparations compromise that would have fallen apart when the Soviets continued to take reparations from the eastern zones and resisted all of the inevitable restrictions on their behavior that came with a common economic plan. In his view, a zonal reparations plan was a form of containment because it would keep the Soviets out of the Western zones, but it also promised to alleviate future tensions with the Soviet Union. As he told Molotov, attempting to work out a common reparations plan “would be a constant source of irritation between us, whereas the United States wanted its relations to be as cordial and friendly as heretofore...What had impressed him the most the most---it was more important than the money involved---was the desire to remove any source of irritation between our two governments.”⁷ Byrnes’s stance on Germany did reflect a guiding philosophy, although putting into practice was far more difficult. America and the Soviet Union could not run Germany together. Trying to run Germany in a cooperative fashion would only make things worse and ensure a high level of future tensions. Why not let the Soviets run their zone as they saw fit and the Western powers would run their own zones as they saw fit? If both sides were happy with this arrangement, the most important issue of the future of Europe and the postwar balance of power would be resolved. If Byrnes was willing to craft a sphere of influence settlement over Germany, there is little logical reason to see why he would be opposed to one in Eastern Europe.

Trachtenberg’s arguments about Byrnes and the German question will come as no surprise to readers of *A Constructed Peace*. What is new and demands serious attention from historians is his argument about Byrnes’s vision and diplomacy concerning Eastern Europe. Whether he intended to or not, it is clear that Trachtenberg’s article challenges previous arguments made by Eduard Mark. In a series of very influential and important articles in the late 1970’s and early 1980’s, Mark advanced a sophisticated and pathbreaking interpretation of American policy toward Eastern Europe.⁸ As he persuasively argued, American policymakers were far from uniformly hostile to a Soviet sphere of influence in Eastern Europe. They were acutely aware of the power realities in the region and accepted the fact and the legitimacy of the Soviet Union seeking to provide for its security in Eastern

⁶ Sir David Waley to Sir W. Eady, July 31, 1945, in *DBPO*, p.1050. See also James McAllister, *No Exit: America and the German Problem 1943-1954* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), pp.84-98.

⁷ Cited in McAllister, *No Exit*, p.91.

⁸ Eduard Mark, “Charles E. Bohlen and the Acceptable Limits of Soviet Hegemony in Eastern Europe,” *Diplomatic History*, 3 (Spring 1979), pp.201-213; and Mark, “American Policy toward Eastern Europe, 1941-1946,” *The Journal of American History*, 68 (September 1981), pp.313-336. More recently, Mark has published an excellent paper on Stalin’s strategies in Europe based on new documents. See Eduard Mark, “Revolution by Degrees: Stalin’s National-Front Strategy for Europe, 1941-1947,” Cold War International History Project, Working Paper No.31 (February 2001).

Europe. However, while American policymakers were willing to reassure the Soviets that their legitimate security needs would be met, Mark argued that there was a very important condition attached. In exchange for being granted the security assurances in Eastern Europe that they were entitled to as a great power, and which the United States could not really contest in any event, the Soviet Union was expected to refrain from interfering in the internal life of the countries of the region. It was the Soviet Union's insistence on their right to a "closed" sphere of influence in Eastern Europe rather than the "open" sphere offered by both FDR and Truman that helped bring about the Cold War

In Mark's view, Byrnes was far from unprincipled and certainly not willing to accept any agreement on Eastern Europe simply for its domestic political effect at home. In the fall of 1945 and throughout much of 1946, Byrnes continued to offer the Soviets an open sphere of influence in Eastern Europe and the Soviets consistently refused to accept what Byrnes was offering. While Byrnes was unable to work out a lasting agreement with Stalin based on open sphere principles, he was certainly not indifferent to the fate of the people of Eastern Europe, as Kennan suggested in his memoirs. As Mark recently argued in an H-Diplo roundtable devoted to Wilson Miscamble's *From Roosevelt to Truman: Potsdam, Hiroshima, and the Cold War*, the idea that Byrnes or other American policymakers had "written off" Eastern Europe after the Potsdam Conference is "not even wrong." Mark's real quarrel was not so much with Miscamble, but with his acceptance of the arguments advanced by Trachtenberg in *A Constructed Peace*.⁹

The disagreement between Mark and Trachtenberg over the nature of American policy toward Eastern Europe in 1945 obviously cannot be resolved here. I also think it is too simplistic to reduce this debate to the question of whether Byrnes had "written off" Eastern Europe in 1945. Trachtenberg argues that Byrnes essentially abandoned the idea that amicable relations with the Soviet Union should in any way be dependent on the acceptance of democratic and liberal governments in Eastern Europe. Eduard Mark clearly believes otherwise. In their work, both scholars have to address evidence that appears to cast doubt on their interpretations. For example, Trachtenberg has to reckon with the fact that American policymakers did seemingly adopt a "vigorous policy" on Romania and Finland at Potsdam and at the London CFM that seemingly goes against his larger argument. On the other hand, Mark has to account for the fact that Byrnes did indeed recognize the still unrepresentative Bulgarian and Romanian governments at the Moscow Conference of December 1945, which would seem to cut against the idea that American policymakers were really all that committed to promoting an open sphere in Eastern Europe. Both Trachtenberg and Mark have plausible explanations for why these examples do not contradict their larger argument, but the larger point is that no single document or single historical example can possibly settle this argument. In my view, the real question at stake is whether or not in 1945 Byrnes was willing to accept an essentially "closed" Soviet sphere of influence in Eastern Europe. Mark strongly suggests that Byrnes and other American policymakers were unwilling to accept a closed sphere, while Trachtenberg

⁹ See Eduard Mark's contribution to the H-Diplo Roundtable on Wilson Miscamble's *From Truman to Roosevelt*, September 10, 2007, <http://www.h-net.msu.edu/diplo/roundtables/PDF/FromTrumantoRoosevelt-Mark.pdf>, pp.30-32.

argues that Byrnes was more than willing to accept such a sphere in order to gain compensating concessions and avoid further confrontations over the region.

On balance, I think the weight of the evidence favors Trachtenberg's interpretation. American policymakers certainly wanted an open sphere in Eastern Europe in 1945, but the important question is whether they were willing to accept a substantively closed sphere if necessary to achieve larger objectives. The best place to start any analysis of American policy toward Eastern Europe in 1945 is with Poland. At Yalta, FDR did take a position consistent with the idea that American policy aimed at an open sphere arrangement. Poland was to ultimately have free elections and the interim Lublin government was not to be recognized until it was substantially broadened to include pro-democratic leaders. Whether FDR would have continued to resist Stalin's efforts to control developments in Poland past the end of the war is an interesting question and it is far from clear what course he would have taken. But what is clear is that Byrnes and Truman abandoned FDR's policy towards Poland in May 1945. As Mark himself argued in 1981, Truman took a much less confrontational line over Poland than FDR; "for all of the brave rhetoric the new president permitted in the first weeks of his accession, virtually his first act in relation to Eastern Europe was to accept what Roosevelt had vowed he would not: in return for Stalin's renewed promise to permit free elections, the United States recognized a 'thinly disguised continuance' of the Lublin regime as the interim government of Poland."¹⁰

Were Byrnes and Truman writing off Poland by accepting a thinly disguised continuance of the Lublin regime? Such a question cannot be answered definitively, but what is clear is that Truman did not believe that the internal arrangements developed in Poland were worth a major confrontation with the Soviet Union. As Truman wrote in his diary, Hopkins's goal in his meeting with Stalin was to let him know that the new president believed that "Poland, Rumania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Austria, Yugoslavia, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia et al. made no difference to U.S. interests only so far as World Peace is concerned."¹¹ Like corrupt American political bosses, such as Tom Pendergast of Missouri, Truman hoped that Stalin would keep up appearances and allow "free" elections in which the final outcome would never be in doubt. Truman and Byrnes would have undoubtedly preferred an open sphere in Poland and the rest of Eastern Europe, and they may well have thought that they might be able to achieve one at a later date, but the clear thrust of the Hopkins Mission was to signal that a substantively closed sphere in Poland was not an important barrier to a productive and cooperative American-Soviet relationship.

Trachtenberg's basic argument is that Byrnes and Truman were willing to accept the Polish solution for both Romania and Bulgaria in 1945 even though it was obvious to all that little had actually changed in Poland. He suggests that much of the very bitter dispute over these two countries at the London CFM meeting in September 1945 could have been avoided if Molotov had simply taken Byrnes up on his offer to settle the Bulgarian and Romanian questions on the basis of the Polish deal worked out by Hopkins. In contrast to those who believe that Byrnes was still pushing strongly for open spheres in the fall of 1945,

¹⁰ Eduard Mark, "American Policy toward Eastern Europe," p.327.

¹¹ Cited in McAllister, *No Exit*, p.64.

Trachtenberg believes that Byrnes, and Stalin as well, were bargaining over and working out arrangements largely based on the reality of closed spheres. At the Moscow Conference in December 1945, the basic deal was struck: the Soviets would accept and legitimate American predominance in the occupation of Japan and the U.S. would recognize unrepresentative governments in Bulgaria and Romania. Unlike most historians, who see the Moscow CFM as an American sellout of Eastern Europe, a fruitless effort at cooperation, or as merely a tactical shift in an effort to preserve an open sphere, Trachtenberg sees the Moscow arrangement as something much more significant. In his view, "It thus seemed that a genuine political accommodation was in the cards in December 1945—that the foundation for a relatively stable great-power political system was being laid at that time."¹²

I find this argument intriguing and quite plausible, but it is entirely possible that Trachtenberg is overstating the strength of the foundation built by the end of 1945. The only way we could know for certain would be if we could carry out a controlled experiment in which Stalin continued to move towards a closed sphere in Eastern Europe and American policy continued to be conciliatory and driven by a desire to maintain amicable relations with the Soviet Union. Alas, history does not allow us to test arguments in this manner. Byrnes and Stalin may have constructed a foundation for a stable peace in Western and Eastern Europe and Japan at the Moscow CFM, but issues like Iran, Turkey, and atomic energy could and did shake that foundation in 1946. In addition, whether for legitimate cause or not, Byrnes soon moved away from trying to head off a Cold War and concentrated more on gaining the upper hand in engagements with the Soviet Union. While Trachtenberg demonstrates that Byrnes had a real and substantial vision of the postwar world, he also acknowledges that Byrnes could only do what he did by not being open about it and by "pulling the wool over people's eyes." Byrnes may have known exactly what he was doing, but it is equally clear that very few other officials within the American government knew exactly what he was doing or what he was trying to accomplish. Even if Byrnes had not run afoul of President Truman by the end of 1945, he certainly would have faced many difficulties in trying to preserve and extend his particular vision of a viable postwar settlement. Nevertheless, Marc Trachtenberg's article is a very welcome contribution to the literature and it breathes new life into a debate that many historians have undoubtedly considered to be long resolved.

¹² Marc Trachtenberg, "The United States and Eastern Europe in 1945: A Reassessment," *Journal of Cold War Studies*, 10 (Fall 2008), p.132.

Review by Norman M. Naimark, Stanford University

This is the second time I have read Marc Trachtenberg's *JCWS* piece, the first time as an anonymous reviewer. He will certainly recognize some of the comments below. Let me say at the outset that I admire the article because: 1) Trachtenberg analyzes documents very carefully, 2) He reads widely and insightfully in the American, German, and translated Russian primary and secondary literature, and 3) His ideas about linking the global rivalry and diplomatic settlements between the Soviet Union and the United States in 1945 are coherent and provocative. I also think it is very wise to reconstruct the world of 1945 without necessary reference to what came later. To think of this as "the origins of the Cold War" already distorts the history of the period. With that said, I still have fundamental differences with his point of view in general and with his treatment of specific cases. Therefore, I think it is worthwhile to restate them in a forum like this.

Trachtenberg argues that there was a deep logic to American policy towards Eastern Europe (indeed towards Soviet expansionism) at the end of the war and the beginning of the peace and that was to divvy up spheres of influence with the Soviets, more or less allow each side to do what they wished in each, and establish the basis for long-term peace based on this formula. Truman and Byrnes on one side, Molotov and Stalin on the other, were comparable realists when it came to international affairs. They played a game of chess, the goal of which was to come to a stalemate, whereby both sides could enjoy their side of the board in peace. First Poland, then Romania and Bulgaria, were given up to the Soviet sphere of influence on this basis, and Japan was absorbed into the Americans' -- the former countries with Washington's acquiescence, even connivance, the latter with the Soviets'. The same logic, in Trachtenberg's view, applied to the German question: the famous "you take your Germany and we'll take ours" deal at Potsdam. This was not constructive engagement (à la Roosevelt), but rather a policy of disengagement, whereby both sides "could get along by pulling apart." (116) And to continue: "But the policy aimed at something more than just a de facto partition between East and West. The goal was to create an agreed framework -- to make sure that the separation was based on a genuine understanding, and that it had a certain official status." (116) In Trachtenberg's view, "Stalin's views were not that different," though he concedes that Stalin may have had other long-term plans in mind. (131)

In an effort not to write an alternative history of the period covered by Trachtenberg, from Yalta in February to the Moscow CFM meetings in December 1945, let me make several related arguments regarding Stalin's views in specific cases, as well as in general. I will leave the analysis of Byrnes and Truman to the specialists on American foreign policy in this period.

1) It's worth beginning any discussion like this by registering the fact that we have very little documentary evidence about Stalin's views when compared to the kinds of materials available on American foreign policy. Historians -- both Western and Russian -- have only episodic access to the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs archives and cannot conduct systematic research there. Researchers other than a few privileged Russians have no access

at all to the Russian Presidential Archive. Even the impressive document collection on Soviet policy towards Germany edited by Georgii Kynin and Jochen Laufer cannot be considered in any way comprehensive. The same goes for the useful, if spotty, Russian collections of Soviet documents about Eastern Europe edited by T. V. Volokitina. The collection of Stalin's papers (*lichnyi fond*) that is located in the former Central Party Archive (RGASPI) remains partly closed; and the inventory of Stalin's papers reveals that a lot of critical material on Eastern Europe has not been transferred from the inaccessible Presidential Archive. Molotov's papers, many of which have been recently opened at RGASPI, do not include his Foreign Ministry papers, which are only partly accessible at the Foreign Ministry Archive. In short, there is a fundamental asymmetry of knowledge when it comes to the American and Soviet side of any bargaining situation. There is no way historians can pin down Stalin's motives and goals with the kind of assurance that one can talk about Byrnes, Acheson, and Truman, whose private papers are available to balance the thorough and accessible public record. The historians Trachtenberg cites -- Vlad Zubok, Odd Arne Westad, et al. -- speculate, just as Trachtenberg speculates. One can retrace Stalin's moves in the chess game, but one can only guess why he made them. Stalin was also a consummate dissimulator. Depending on the circumstances, the interlocutors, and the goals of the conversation, he said different, even diametrically opposed, things. To construct a consistent view of Stalin's foreign policy objectives in this period, even given the best of available evidence, is an exercise in historical imagination.

2) While it may not be crucial to his overall argument, I think Trachtenberg leaves out some important aspects of the Polish story. There was no Stalin blueprint for the takeover of Eastern Europe during the war. At the same time, there was a general understanding in Moscow that the Soviet Union would be rewarded for victory with the (illicit) territorial gains of the 1939-41 period, plus the kind of influence in Poland and Romania that would guarantee those gains. It is worth recalling that the Poles suffered terribly at the hands of the Soviets (in alliance with the Nazis) in 1939-41; some three hundred thousand Poles were deported to Siberia, Central Asia, and the Soviet north, tens of thousands were murdered (including the 23,000 victims of the Katyn massacres), and Polish sovereignty was abrogated as a result of the Nazi-Soviet pact. The Soviet break in relations with the London Poles and the advance of Soviet troops into eastern Poland in 1944 presaged little better, as underground fighters were disarmed, arrested, deported, and sometimes tried and executed. No wonder the Poles looked at the Soviets "as enemy number 2" and the London Poles did not accept "the new Western border" of the USSR. (100) If Trachtenberg is right that Byrnes accepted the "new situation" in Poland that was dictated by the Soviets, then it was a shameful U.S. policy, and not at all the equivalent of U.S. policy towards Bulgaria and Romania, countries that had been allies of the Axis during the war and, in the case of the Romanians, actively fought against and brutally occupied territories of the Soviet Union. If, as Trachtenberg argues, the U.S. began to make a fuss about Bulgaria and Romania, it might well have been about justifiable guilt about what had happened in Poland. Stalin was certainly determined that there be a government in Poland that was "friendly" to the Soviet Union. But it is not true that "total control" was the essence of Soviet policy, nor is it true that the communists were not interested in sharing power. (102) On the contrary, Wladyslaw Gomulka, in particular, looked to the Social Democrats, to the Polish Peasant Party, to Catholics, and to small landowners as allies of the communists in

this period. For the time being his policies conformed to Moscow's dictates about the "anti-fascist democratic revolution" in this period. Trachtenberg has it right at the end, when he states that: "This [a non-communist but "friendly" Poland on its border] turned out to be an illusion, but it was not preposterous to think... in June 1945 that Stalin would be willing to settle for an arrangement of this sort."(103)

3) At the end of the war, the Soviet Union was prostrate. The country was devastated; 27 million Soviet citizens had been killed; tens of millions lived in abject poverty; the army was spent; the coffers were empty; discipline in the military and at home was shaky at best. Stalin understood very well the frightful weakness of the country and tried to cover it up. At the same time, he was desperate for substantial reparations and loans, both of which were promised by Roosevelt, but reneged on by Truman and Byrnes. He was also desperate for a long period of peace for the Soviet Union, which, he sometimes speculated, would be aided by war between the major capitalist powers, the U.S. and Great Britain. The United States, on the other hand, was fully capable of fighting another war. By the time of Potsdam, Washington had tested the atom bomb, which oddly plays no role in Trachtenberg's narrative. What was far worse for Stalin than knowledge about the bomb was its actual use in Japan. As demonstrated by David Holloway's work, Stalin gave panicky orders to focus all the country's resources on building a Soviet bomb right way. In short, the U.S. was fully capable of bringing its "preponderance of power" to bear against the Soviets. It was also capable of delivering substantial financial resources to Stalin for the rebuilding of the Soviet Union. What does this mean in terms of Trachtenberg's argument? First, if the U.S. had the political will, there might have been a different outcome of the Polish question. One does not have to suggest in retrospect the irresponsible use of American military power to deal with Soviet violations of the Yalta agreement to note that Stalin had no way to stand up to the Americans. But neither the stick of potential military action nor the carrot of financial incentives -- nor any creative combination of the two -- was used in diplomacy to produce a different outcome in Poland. We really do not know what kind of result it might have produced. Second, as I will argue later on, overwhelming American military power guaranteed that the Soviets would not have an occupation zone in Japan. This was not a deal including southeastern Europe, as Trachtenberg indicates. American military power could have been invoked in Eastern Europe in a similar way. There was simply not the political will or public support to do so. Third, the game that was being played around the world was poker, more than chess. Stalin played his hand to the full, though he was holding inferior cards almost everywhere. He understood that bluffs and hardness would get one further with the Americans than concessions and honesty. That was the message he sent to Molotov at the London CFM meetings in September 1945. Of course he was ready to divide up the world with the Americans. Why wouldn't he be? He was the weaker player. In fact, he backed away from any serious confrontation that might rouse the Americans to military action. Even when he could have moved forward -- crossing south of the 38th parallel in Korea is a good example -- he demonstrated restraint.

4) I fundamentally disagree with Trachtenberg's assertion that Stalin was delighted with a "two Germanys" solution in 1945. There are problems with Wilfried Loth's arguments about Stalin's eagerness to be rid of his "unloved child," but there is also much evidence for this point of view. There are scores of documents that demonstrate Stalin's

repeated commitment to an “all-German” solution and show that he had no interest in a separate German communist mini-“country.” He wanted access to and indefinite military control over all of Germany, which, unlike Japan, had invaded the “motherland” and had forced the Soviets into a war of unprecedented brutality. Neither he nor the Americans thought a divided Germany would work in any case, and they most certainly did not think so in 1945. Both the Soviets and the Americans were petrified that a divided Germany would be the source of German revanchism and a new war, something akin to the reparations problem following WWI. What was going on in the eastern zone itself was the product -- not unlike the West -- of a variety of different influences (Foreign Ministry, Military Government, the Military itself, the German Communists, the Reparations Teams, and so on) that I tried to describe in my book, *The Russians in Germany*. There is no quote used more often in the historiography of the division of Europe than Milovan Djilas’s recollection (true? false? under what circumstances? why did Djilas remember this?) of Stalin’s prediction that Europe’s social systems would be determined by how far the respected armies marched. (121) First of all, it did not prove true; Soviet armies withdrew from the Danish island of Bornholm, from Benes’s “democratic” Czechoslovakia, and from Austria. Second, there is good reason to think, especially in an April 1944 discussion with Djilas, that Stalin was telling the militant Yugoslavs that they should “cool it” and entertain no hopes for the expansion of communism in Italy, Greece, or divided Austria. Meanwhile they could go ahead and “swallow” Albania, which was of no interest to the West. Stalin was deeply wary of breaking up the alliance to come to the aid of communists in these countries.

5) It may well be that the United States used “East European precedents as a way of fending off the Soviet challenge in Japan.”(125) But I would suggest that fundamental American interests in dominating postwar Japan -- after all we had fought a cruel war against the Japanese in the Pacific since 1941 without any Soviet assistance -- gave the Soviets little chance of taking part in the occupation, whether or not there were precedents for excluding the Soviets in the exclusion of the Americans in southeastern Europe. At the same time, Stalin was bitterly disappointed that the Soviets were not allowed to occupy northern Hokkaido. I do not buy Trachtenberg’s argument that there was some kind of “deal” about Japan and the Balkans. One could say without exaggeration that the Americans didn’t have all that much at stake in Bulgaria and Romania and had written off these countries fairly quickly as part of a Soviet sphere of influence, as Trachtenberg notes. Everything Stalin said about Japan and did in reference to the potential Soviet occupation zone reflected the deep Russian humiliation in the 1905 War with the Japanese and the important geostrategic goal of a Soviet occupation presence in Hokkaido. Something else must be at work in connection with the October 1945 quote attributed to Stalin that he didn’t want Soviet troops in Japan. (126) Certainly he was not interested in Soviet troops being under the command of the Americans or being able to mix with the Americans; this would expose his weaknesses to the West.

6) In his article, Trachtenberg thinks about Stalin without consideration of the Marxist-Leninist ideological lenses through which he saw the world. I think that can lead to some misunderstandings of Stalin’s goals. To be sure, as Trachtenberg indicates, Stalin was willing in 1945 to allow the Americans to dominate Western Europe. (Too bad, he later said

to the French communist leader, Maurice Thorez, that the Soviet armies did not march into Paris!) But his instructions to the Italian communists were not to give up their revolutionary aims and be just a legal party, but to store their arms and keep their powder dry for a more propitious day. These same instructions went out to communists in France and in western Germany. From Stalin's point of view, the opportunity for revolution would come, indeed must come, whether at the point of Soviet bayonets, once the USSR was strong enough, or as a consequence of the contradictions within capitalism and war between the Western allies. Stalin's concessions about Western Europe, including Greece, were not part of some grand deal, though he was certainly glad the Americans were willing to think so; for him, these moves were about knowing one's goals, understanding one's strengths and weaknesses, and dealing with an implacable opponent, who would strangle you "like kittens" (he later said to Khrushchev), if he had the chance. The same logic applies to Eastern Europe. Given the American proclivity to make a deal with Moscow at the end of the war described by Trachtenberg, there was probably no way that Stalin would not have gained control of the political systems of Poland and Romania. But in 1945, Hungary and Czechoslovakia were still open questions. Stalin insisted that the communists cooperate with other parties and join in parliamentary coalitions. As for eastern Germany, he delayed plans for the formation of the GDR until the Bonn republic was already constituted. He was left with no choice. Throughout the region, he punished revolutionary "sectarians" and encouraged "democratic" land reforms and nationalization programs. This is not because he gave up his vision of the necessary advance of socialism in Europe, but because he was not willing to confront the West. He would move stage by stage, as Zbigniew Brzezinski and Hugh Seton-Watson correctly pointed out long ago. What historians don't know for certain -- and as yet have no way of knowing -- is whether Stalin planned this strategy and its stages from the very beginning. Trachtenberg wisely brings Japan into the argument. Stalin was desperate to get an occupation zone in Japan and did everything he could short of force to accomplish it. At least, he was able to secure a zone of occupation in Germany, though again, I am convinced he was displeased with the overall outcome.

Trachtenberg begins his article: "There was a time when it all seemed so simple." (94) He refers here to the earlier historiography that put the onus of the division of Europe and the development of the Cold War on Soviet expansionism in Eastern Europe and American opposition to it. He demonstrates that American policy was realistic about accepting a Soviet sphere of influence in Eastern Europe and alert to making trade-offs with the Soviets, like the one that kept them out of Japan. The central problem with his argument is its suggestion that Stalin and the Soviets acted in a similar fashion out of similar motivations. To paraphrase Trachtenberg's opening: things are still not so simple.

Author's Response by Marc Trachtenberg, University of California, Los Angeles

The article that is the subject of this roundtable came into being almost by accident. In September 2007 H-Diplo published a roundtable on Wilson Miscamble's *From Roosevelt to Truman* and Eduard Mark was one of the commentators. In his comment, Dr. Mark criticized Professor Miscamble for largely embracing an argument I had made in my book about the post-World War II European settlement to the effect that the American government, in the second half of 1945, essentially accepted eastern Europe as a Soviet sphere of influence—and not just as an “open sphere” but as an area in which the USSR would basically have a free hand. My argument about U.S. policy on eastern Europe, Dr. Mark wrote (using Wolfgang Pauli's famous phrase), was “not even wrong”; the “evidence advanced for it,” he claimed, had “a certain fanciful quality.”¹ I wrote a reply and Dr. Mark posted a rejoinder a few days later.² I started to work on a response to that, but the draft became so long and the material I found was (at least to me) so interesting that I thought it would make sense to develop it into an article.

The project soon took on a life of its own. It became more focused on the substantive issue—the interpretation of American policy on eastern Europe in 1945—than on my disagreements with Dr. Mark. I wrote a draft and got some very good criticism from a number of people. That criticism forced me to rethink some major issues and I ended up rewriting some key parts of the paper. But even the revised draft I sent in to the *Journal of Cold War Studies* [JCWS] was far from perfect. A major weakness in that draft, it's quite clear in retrospect, had to do with my treatment of Soviet policy, which was much too thin. But the comment I got from the anonymous reviewer (who, thanks to this roundtable, I now know to be Norman Naimark) was extraordinarily helpful. It was, in fact, the most useful reader's report I have ever gotten on anything I have written. I spent quite some time thinking through some of the major problems relating to the interpretation of Soviet policy in 1945 in the light of the various works Professor Naimark had suggested I read, and I revised the piece accordingly. The result is the article we are now discussing.

I very much appreciate the fact that the editors of H-Diplo have organized this roundtable, and I think it's important that we continue to discuss the issues that article was concerned with in a serious way. I was also very pleased when I saw who the contributors were. They are all experts in the area I was concerned with, and each of them has produced works—and I hope no one thinks this is mere boilerplate—which I deeply admire. But I am not going to spend the same amount of time responding to each of the commentators. With

¹ Eduard Mark contribution to the H-Diplo Roundtable on Wilson D. Miscamble, *From Roosevelt to Truman: Potsdam, Hiroshima, and the Cold War* (10 September 2007), 31 n. 19 (<http://www.h-net.org/~diplo/roundtables/PDF/FromTrumantoRoosevelt-Roundtable.pdf>).

² Trachtenberg post, H-Diplo, 12 September 2007; [http://h-net.msu.edu/cgi-bin/logbrowse.pl?trx=vx&list=H-Diplo&month=0709&week=b&msg=X%2b9wk5nGF7K7xFaH2nNvuA&user=&pw=Eduard Mark post, H-Diplo, 18 September 2007. http://h-net.msu.edu/cgi-bin/logbrowse.pl?trx=vx&list=H-Diplo&month=0709&week=c&msg=lpz6F/f05ioUp5ezUVz9Zg&user=&pw=](http://h-net.msu.edu/cgi-bin/logbrowse.pl?trx=vx&list=H-Diplo&month=0709&week=b&msg=X%2b9wk5nGF7K7xFaH2nNvuA&user=&pw=Eduard%20Mark%20post%20H-Diplo%2018%20September%202007)

regard to Professor McAllister's comment, in fact, I don't have much to say at all, since, I'm delighted to note, he and I basically see eye-to-eye.

But Fraser Harbutt and I do have some real differences of opinion. Professor Harbutt, I think, is basically sympathetic to the sort of argument I made, but has "some reservations," he says, "about the height of the pedestal" I built for Byrnes, and in particular sees more continuity between Roosevelt's policy at Yalta and Byrnes's policy at Potsdam and after than I do. He also thinks that when you look at what happened in 1946, you can see that Byrnes was not quite as dominant a figure as I had made out. In 1946, he says, Byrnes was "indeed, as he had been in 1945, the executor of American policy. But, as before, he worked within a framework set by others." The basic problem with the article, in his view, was that the framework was too narrow; to understand the Byrnes policy of late 1945, you have to view it in a broader context—you have to look at the Roosevelt policy and you have to look at what happened in early 1946.

Now, in principle, these are all fair points, and the article obviously did have a rather narrow focus. But I've spent some time thinking about the Roosevelt policy and also about U.S. policy in 1946. And as I see it, first of all, there were major differences between Roosevelt's policy, say at Yalta, and Byrnes's policy in the second half of 1945. Professor Harbutt says that "from late 1943 on through the Yalta conference of February 1945, [FDR] found it necessary to respond to Soviet pressure and move toward more substantive but morally dubious arrangements with Stalin over Poland and Eastern Europe, tangible 'accommodations' that he never fully acknowledged in public, resorting instead to political manipulation and deceit, particularly over the true nature of the Yalta understandings." I didn't go into this important issue in the JCWS piece, but my sense is that while there were certain elements in the Roosevelt policy that did point in this direction, FDR had not really decided how he wanted to deal with these issues. I personally wouldn't use a phrase like "the true nature of the Yalta understandings." It's not clear to me that they even had an unambiguous "true nature." But I do think we're on much firmer ground when we're analyzing the Potsdam understandings. The evidence published in the second volume of the State Department's collection of Potsdam documents—to my mind, the single most revealing volume in the whole *Foreign Relations of the United States* [FRUS] series—strikes me as a lot less ambiguous.³ Byrnes's policy, both at Potsdam and in late 1945, was much clearer than Roosevelt's Yalta policy had been: in his own mind, I think, Byrnes had a much sharper sense for how to proceed.

But what about 1946? Does it make sense to view Byrnes as working at that time "within a framework set by others"? I don't see him as someone who was overwhelmed by events—as someone who, "had he been listened to respectfully" might "have saved us from the Cold War." I think Byrnes remained very much in the driver's seat in early 1946. The change in policy that took place at that time was not forced on him. He shifted course for what I think were good reasons. I talked about these things in my book about the European

³ United States Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States* [FRUS]: *The Conference of Berlin (The Potsdam Conference)*, vol. 2 (Washington: GPO, 1960).

settlement.⁴ But the JCWS article was just about 1945, and I didn't think it made sense to discuss them there. Maybe the article could have been framed differently, but I didn't want to bite off more than I could chew.

Norman Naimark's comment is rather different. He is not really concerned, he says, with the interpretation of U.S. foreign policy in 1945. He is mainly interested in the question of how Soviet policy at that time is to be understood. And on the most fundamental level, he and I take the same view. "Of course," he writes in his comment, Stalin "was ready to divide up the world with the Americans. Why wouldn't he be?" But we differ on a whole series of more specific questions. Professor Naimark thinks that the Soviets were not nearly so intent on taking over—and that means in eventually communizing—the areas their armies occupied at the end of the war as I had claimed. He says, for example, that there "was no Stalin blueprint for the takeover of Eastern Europe during the war." In the case of Poland, he writes, it was "not true that 'total control' was the essence of Soviet policy," nor was "it true that the communists were not interested in sharing power" there. With regard to Germany, he says, "there are scores of documents that demonstrate Stalin's repeated commitment to an 'all-German' solution and show that he had no interest in a separate German communist mini-'country.'" Neither Stalin "nor the Americans," he argues, "thought a divided Germany would work in any case, and they most certainly did not think so in 1945." In his book *The Russians in Germany* he takes the same basic line. The Soviets, he writes, were "initially committed to the unity of Germany." Their goal, he thinks, was a four-power agreement that would provide for a unified, demilitarized and neutralized German state.⁵

And yet both in his comment here and in his other writings he occasionally says things that point in a rather different direction. He sometimes suggests that the Soviets, especially in the case of Germany, had no clear policy at all—that the Soviets did not occupy that country with any "specific long-range goals in mind."⁶ And he sometimes seems to suggest that the Soviets, even in 1945, were indeed out to communize not just Poland, Bulgaria and Romania, but also the eastern zone in Germany and even Czechoslovakia and Hungary. In all those countries, he writes (in a piece co-authored with Leonid Gibianskii), "the Kremlin and the communist parties it supervised preferred to abstain from the kind of forced Sovietization that characterized Yugoslavia and Albania. . . . Instead, the Soviets chose a more prolonged movement towards what seemed to constitute a socialist order. In the sphere of politics, this course of action manifested itself in efforts aimed at gradually increasing the role played by the communist parties in the national governments, simultaneously ousting [in the case of Bulgaria, Poland, Romania, and the Soviet zone of Germany] or gradually marginalizing [in the case of Czechoslovakia and Hungary] those forces which were opposed to the communists either as rivals for power or as temporary fellow travelers." The Communists, he and Gibianskii continue, "complemented these

⁴ Marc Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace: The Making of the European Settlement, 1945-1963* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), chap. 2, esp. 38-40, 42-45.

⁵ Norman Naimark, *The Russians in Germany: A History of the Soviet Zone of Occupation, 1945-1949* (Cambridge MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1995), 251 (for the quotation), 351-352.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 465.

policies with the subordination of their partners on the left.” A “number of ‘democratic’ facades”—“political coalitions, multi-party systems, and parliaments”—remained. Some scholars, they point out, have argued that Stalin’s talk about a democratic road to socialism is to be taken seriously, but the documents that have become available in recent years, they say, make it apparent “that the means by which socialism would be accomplished had little to do with the normal processes of politics and parliaments. On the contrary, the practical execution of socialist policies by the communist parties and their Soviet mentors, from its very inception, relied on administrative pressure, subversion, and direct repression, including attacks on the opposition and leftist allies if they proved too independent or resistant.”⁷

Doesn’t this suggest pretty clearly that there was a policy at work here? Doesn’t this imply that the Soviets were not interested, in the final analysis, in sharing power in countries like Poland? In any event, what I take away from all this is the sense that despite what he says in his comment here, Professor Naimark is not really locked into any particular interpretation—that he’s not quite sure what the answers are, and that he feels we all still have a lot to learn about these issues.

But where does that leave the rest of us? The issue is so important that everyone working on this period needs to form some sort of opinion about what the Soviets were up to at the time. The direct evidence we have access to might be far from perfect, but none of us can remain completely agnostic on this issue. Normally those of us who are not experts in this area and who cannot read Russian or any east European language would be inclined to defer to the judgment of those scholars who do specialize in this area. It would be hard to argue with them if they all took the same line. But they obviously don’t, and some of them—Naimark’s own collaborator Leonid Gibianskii, for example—think the USSR’s initially mild stance was a sham and that the Soviets by 1945 were intent on communizing eastern Europe.⁸ And with regard to Germany, some leading experts (like Jochen Laufer, whose book on the question is due to come out later this year) think that the Soviets were determined very early on to create their own Communist state in the eastern zone—a policy which they knew meant that Germany would be divided.⁹ Many other examples of

⁷ Norman Naimark and Leonid Gibianskii, introduction to “The Soviet Union and the Establishment on Communist Regimes in Eastern Europe, 1944-1954: A Documentary Collection” (Washington: National Council for Eurasian and East European Research, 2006; http://www.ucis.pitt.edu/nceer/2004_817-16_Gibianskii.pdf), 22-24.

⁸ See, for example, Leonid Gibianskii, “Osteuropa: Sicherheitszone der UdSSR, sowjetisiertes Protektorat des Kreml oder Sozialismus ‘ohne Dictatur des Proletariats’? Zu den Diskussionen über Stalins Osteuropa-Politik am Ende des Zweiten Weltkrieges und am Anfang des Kalten Krieges: Frage der Quellen und ihrer adäquaten Interpretation,” *Forum für osteuropäische Ideen- und Zeitgeschichte* 8:2 (2004), esp. 125, and also Naimark’s characterization of Gibianskii’s views in his article “Post-Soviet Russian Historiography on the Emergence of the Soviet Bloc,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 5:4 (Summer 2004), 569.

⁹ As we learn more from the Communist sources, Laufer says, it seems increasingly likely that Stalin, “under the flag of unity was actually striving to set up his own German state and thus divide Germany.” Jochen Laufer, “Sowjetische Quellen zur deutschen Zeitgeschichte—Forschungs- und Editionsprobleme,” Podiumsdiskussion am 15. November 2004 (Berlin, 2005), 14, quoted in [Wilfried Loth review of Jochen Laufer and Georgij Kynin, eds., Die UdSSR und die deutsche Frage 1941-1948, in H-Soz-u-Kult, 7 April 2005](#) (on H-net).

that lack of historiographical consensus could be cited. But given that situation, how do we go about getting to the bottom of these issues?

For me, there was only one way, and that was to read as much of the specialized literature as I could (in English, French and German) and then analyze the arguments I found there in the light of the evidence the authors themselves presented. And that, incidentally, was why Professor Naimark's reader's report was so valuable. In that report he named seventeen authors who had done important work on Soviet policy in 1945 (and whose writings had appeared in languages he knew I could read). He suggested, using fairly strong language, that I needed to look at everything I could by people like that, and that I should also read everything relevant that had appeared in the two main English-language journals in this field, the *Journal of Cold War Studies* and *Cold War History*. I took that advice very seriously and went through that literature systematically, again trying to assess the various claims people made in the light of the evidence they themselves presented.

And I did reach what were for me some important conclusions, although perhaps not the conclusions which Professor Naimark had hoped I would reach. With regard to eastern Europe, it seemed clear to me that by the end of the war the Soviets were determined to Sovietize at least some of the key countries in the region, and that the policy of working with non-Communist parties in broadly-based but Communist-dominated coalitions was to be understood in essentially tactical terms. With regard to Germany, it seemed quite clear that the Soviets in 1945 were not seriously interested in running that country together with the western powers, or indeed in establishing any sort of unified German state which they did not effectively control. But I also got the impression that Stalin was realistic enough to understand, from Potsdam on, that the western powers would not allow him to take over that entire country. With regard to western Europe, I saw no reason to quarrel with the notion that Stalin would have been delighted if the whole region went Communist, and I think he might well have believed that the laws of history were such that this was bound to happen in the long run. But for the time being—and given his respect for American power, the “time being” might have been very long indeed—he was prepared to live with the status quo there, and indeed to restrain the Communist parties in western Europe, so long as the western powers did not meddle excessively in his sphere of influence in eastern Europe. None of this, of course, means that Stalin had any sort of “blueprint” for postwar Europe. The idea is only that he had a general set of goals and a general strategy for achieving them, which, however, he was prepared in practice to apply with a certain degree of flexibility.

I can't review here in any detail the kind of analysis that led to those conclusions, although I did cite some of the key sources in the article (especially in note 2 for eastern Europe and in notes 87-91 for Germany). But let me just say here that Professor Naimark's own work, I think, tends in some ways to support the conclusions I reached—that is, that it supports the idea that Stalin was playing a very active role in the process that led to the communization of eastern Europe. For example, in the piece he co-authored with Gibianskii, he refers to

“Stalin’s explicit instructions at the end of the war to destroy the Polish Home Army underground and to cut off the Warsaw Uprising from any outside help.”¹⁰

Even on the German question, his analysis sometimes points to the conclusion that the Soviets were more serious about communizing their zone than he is generally prepared to admit. Note, for example, the way he ends the introductory section in his chapter in *The Russians in Germany* on “Building the East German Police State”: “It is worth thinking about general Soviet policy considerations in light of the systematic attempt by the Soviet Military Administration to build up secret police and paramilitary police units. There is no reason to doubt the sincerity of Soviet statements (and actions) intended to foster the unity of Germany and the end to four-power occupation in the immediate postwar period. At the same time, the way in which the Soviets and the KPD/SED constructed the police structure in eastern Germany corroborates the argument that plans were in the making for the permanent Sovietization of the zone.”¹¹ But why shouldn’t the fact that the Soviets were building a police state in eastern Germany make us wonder about how seriously the rhetorical support for German unity is to be taken? For me, what Naimark shows about what the Soviets were doing in their zone meant that there *was* “reason to doubt the sincerity” of the USSR’s declaratory policy—although I personally wouldn’t blame the Soviet Union for its hypocrisy in this area, especially since I think the western powers were “guilty” of much the same thing.

The general conclusions I came to in this area were of course not terribly original, and in fact they strike me as quite moderate. The idea that the USSR wanted ultimately to communize eastern Europe (or eastern Germany), but was prepared to accept western Europe (or western Germany) as lying within the western sphere of influence is actually a middle-of-the-road view. It’s less extreme than the idea that the Soviets were intent on taking over all of Europe, or all of Germany. It doesn’t see the Soviets as taking quite that hard a line. On the other hand, it doesn’t see them as taking a soft line either—as being willing at the end of the day to live with non-Communist regimes in countries like Poland or to accept a unified, non-Communist German state. Given the fact that it lies at the middle of the spectrum, it’s something of a puzzle to me that it’s not more widely accepted.

Now, finally, let me turn to Eduard Mark’s comment. Dr. Mark doesn’t accept my argument at all and in fact thinks that Byrnes’s policy in 1945 is to be understood in a very different way. His idea is that Byrnes was prepared to accept a Soviet “open sphere” in eastern Europe, but nothing more. The United States could live with a “Finlandized” eastern Europe, but Byrnes, he thinks, was never willing to signal “publicly or privately that he was willing to accept ‘Communist regimes that were the instruments of Soviet control there.’” The key thing for Byrnes, in his view, was to end the “Soviet occupations in Eastern Europe” by getting peace treaties signed as quickly as possible. Byrnes, the argument runs, hoped that the signing of the treaties would lead to the “speedy departure of Soviet troops” and thus to fundamental political change in the region; the countries there would have to accommodate to Soviet power in major ways, but on internal matters they would be relatively free to run on their own affairs. The Soviets, moreover, Byrnes calculated, might

¹⁰ Naimark and Gibianskii, “The Soviet Union and the Establishment of Communist Regimes in Eastern Europe,” iii; see also 11-12.

¹¹ Naimark, *The Russians in Germany*, 355.

ease up on eastern Europe if they were more secure, and to help put them minds at rest he offered to sign a treaty with them guaranteeing that Germany would remain demilitarized.

He cites a good deal of evidence which he thinks supports that line of argument. But not much of that evidence shows us, in any really compelling way, what was in Byrnes's mind in 1945. What Byrnes wrote in his memoirs, or said in a speech, or told a journalist or a Congressional committee, simply cannot be taken at face value. There's often a huge gap between the official line, as it's laid out in public, and what a political leader really believes. Policies have to be rationalized in terms which key audiences will find palatable; it thus cannot be assumed that public utterances reveal the actual basis for a policy. And for obvious reasons remarks made in 1946 or later, after the Cold War had set in, do not necessarily tell us much about what the thinking was in 1945. Finally, what other officials wrote, even in private and even in 1945, simply cannot be taken as reflecting Byrnes's own views. Byrnes might well have been interested in the views of people like Bohlen even if—perhaps especially if—he did not share them, and Bohlen might not have felt the need to lay out his views in writing if he had sensed that he and Byrnes already saw things the same way. So one cannot assume that documents like the Bohlen memo which Dr. Mark cites actually tell us much about what Byrnes himself was thinking.

A good deal of the evidence which Dr. Mark cites, moreover, is not particularly strong in its own terms. At one point, for example, he says, Byrnes “coupled reassurance of the Soviets with a frankly stated intention to limit Soviet influence over Eastern Europe and the former German satellites in particular.” “To see so,” he continues, “one needs to look no further than the Secretary's testimony before the Senate's Committee on Foreign Relations in May 1947.” He then quotes two sentences from that testimony: “Until the treaties are ratified, the armistice regimes remain in force. As long as they remain in force none of the states subject to them can look forward to a future free from the possibility of interference in every phase in their national life, and interference which by the terms of the armistice other countries are required to recognize and accept.” But was Byrnes in that passage really stating his intention “to limit Soviet influence over Eastern Europe”? I don't see it. Byrnes would certainly have preferred it if the Soviets relaxed their grip on countries like Romania and Bulgaria, and he was suggesting here that getting the peace treaties signed might lead to more freedom for those countries—although, as Dr. Mark admits, he could not have been too confident at that point that the signing of the treaties would have that result. But if, as seemed likely, the Soviets were not willing to allow the Communist regimes in the region to collapse—if they were not prepared, that is, to tolerate a much greater degree of independence for the countries in question—it is by no means clear from those comments that Byrnes was prepared to do much about it. And by May 1947 there wasn't much he could do about it in any case: although Dr. Mark gives the impression that Byrnes was still in office at the time, he was no longer Secretary of State when he made those remarks, having been replaced by Marshall four months earlier.

But the main point to note about Dr. Mark's long comment is that most of the evidence he presents does not really tell us much about what Byrnes was actually thinking in 1945. So when one strips away all that extraneous matter, when one focuses on what Dr. Mark actually shows about what the Secretary was saying in private in 1945, what is one left with?

He cites just three documents recording remarks Byrnes made in private at the time. The first does support his general argument. A treaty to guarantee that Germany would remain demilitarized, Byrnes told an associate (on the very day that he proposed such a treaty to Molotov), would “relieve Sov. mind of any fear of invasion and they could let the small neighboring countries go along their paths of peace and democracy.” But this strikes me as basically a throwaway line. A real judgment about what the purpose of the proposed treaty was needs to rest on a much more substantial evidentiary base. And I should note in this context that when Byrnes met with Molotov to propose the idea, he began by talking about how Stalin had said that “there was always the danger” that the United States might withdraw from Europe, “at which time the danger of a recrudescence of German aggression might become real.”¹² The suggestion was, therefore, that the whole point of the treaty would be to keep America in Europe, and perhaps that was Byrnes’s chief goal in proposing it.¹³ But that, of course, is perfectly consistent with the idea that he was thinking in terms of U.S. forces remaining in western Europe on a more or less permanent basis, and thus of a Europe divided between an American and a Soviet sphere. It was also consistent with the idea that that sort of arrangement should be worked out on as friendly a basis as possible. In any event, I personally would like to learn more about the issue, and especially about what Byrnes had in mind when he proposed the demilitarization treaty.

A second document, cited in his note 65, shows Byrnes saying “to a friend” during the September 1945 London meeting that “he saw no solution to the problem of Russia,” adding, however: “We must find one.” This is, of course, consistent with both his argument and mine. It really does not shed much light on the basic issue we’re concerned with here.

The third document, which Dr. Mark cites on four separate occasions, is the record of a meeting of the Secretaries of State, War and Navy (the “Committee of Three”), held on November 6, 1945.¹⁴ I’d like to talk a bit about his use of that key document, because I think he has simply misread it. Let me begin by quoting the passage in question from Dr. Mark’s comment. Byrnes’s “original intentions,” he says, “are quite clear”:

They were not, as Trachtenberg would have it, to divide the world cleanly in two and then to have as little to do with the Soviets as possible. Speaking to the Committee of Three on November 3, 1945

¹² Byrnes-Molotov meeting, 20 September 1945, FRUS 1945, 2:268.

¹³ This in fact was one of the main reasons why Stalin immediately rejected the idea. A treaty of the sort Byrnes had in mind, he wrote Molotov (who had initially seemed to favor the proposal), would provide “a formal sanction for the US playing the same role in European affairs as the USSR”—a piece of evidence which, I should note, runs against the grain of my argument about Stalin being open to the idea of a spheres of influence arrangement with the United States. But in September 1945 he was particularly worked up against the Americans (probably because of what had gone on in Romania and Bulgaria the previous month) and soon returned to a more moderate view. For the quotation, see Stalin’s letter to Molotov of 21 September 1945, quoted in Vladimir Pechatnov, “‘The Allies are Pressing on you to Break your Will . . .’: Foreign Policy Correspondence Between Stalin and Molotov And Other Politburo Members, September 1945-December 1946,” Cold War International History Project Working Paper No. 26 (September 1999; <http://www.wilsoncenter.org/topics/pubs/ACFB29.PDF>), 5.

¹⁴ Dr. Mark gives an archival reference of sorts (“NARA, RG 59”—nothing more), but the passage he quotes from that document is included in the extract published in FRUS 1945, 6:832-834. As I note in brackets in the bloc quotation, although Dr. Mark gave the date as November 3 when he referred to the document in his comment, the meeting was actually held on November 6, as his own footnote 17 makes clear.

[actually November 6], Byrnes opposed a proposal by the Secretary of War to exclude the Soviets from the occupational regime for Japan, saying “that the trouble is such a step is merely making for two worlds and preparing the course for another war. The Soviets believe that the rest of the world is ganging up on them and he considered it most important for the future peace of the world to work in cooperation with them.”

I’d like the reader to compare this with the text of the actual document. You’ll only have to read a single page, and that page can be found either by clicking [here](#) or by looking it up in FRUS.¹⁵ And I’d also like you to read a page from another document, Assistant Secretary of War McCloy’s letter to Under Secretary of State Acheson of November 15, 1945, which gives the War Department view, and which you can find by clicking [here](#) or checking the FRUS volume.¹⁶

If you read those two pages, you’ll see that whereas Dr. Mark says that the Secretary of War proposed “to exclude the Soviets from the occupational regime for Japan,” the War Department had been working on the assumption that the USSR *would* participate and was irritated to discover that Byrnes had a different view. It was only after Byrnes pointed out at the November 6 meeting that Stalin did not want to send troops and thought that “the entire occupation of Japan should be left to the Americans” that Secretary of War Patterson said it was okay to leave “the Russians out if they don’t want to come.” It is thus a gross distortion to say that he was “proposing” that the Soviets be “excluded” from the occupation. And whereas Dr. Mark says that Byrnes “opposed” the proposal to “exclude” the USSR, in reality Byrnes at that meeting expressed the view “that Stalin’s position [that the USSR should not participate] was sound and that the presence of other Allied forces could not but be a source of considerable irritation.” He agreed with Stalin that the Soviet Union should not take part in the occupation, and indeed he wanted the Americans to run the whole show. What he opposed was the idea that British, Chinese, and Australian troops should be part of the occupying force.

It is in that context that Byrnes made the comment which Dr. Mark quoted in his comment about how “such a step” would make “for two worlds” and prepare “the course for another war.” The “step” which he was warning against was not the *exclusion* of the Soviets from Japan, as Dr. Mark would have it, but rather the *inclusion* of Britain, Australia, and China. Byrnes’s basic assumption here was that the line should be drawn between America and Russia (as two great powers dealing directly with each other), and not between the USSR and a large non-Communist bloc (which would have had certain ideological overtones). There would still be a clean division of influence between the United States and the Soviet Union, but there would be no “ganging up.” This was consistent with the idea that the separation should be as amicable as possible. All of this, I should note, was somewhat different from the policy Byrnes had pursued at Potsdam, where he did tend to think of the western powers as forming a political unit; and it differed from the policy he would pursue on the German question in 1946, which was also based on the idea that the western powers would come together as a unit. But the position Byrnes took at that November meeting was

¹⁵ Meeting of the Secretaries of State, War, and Navy, 6 November 1945 (extract), FRUS 1945, 6:833.

¹⁶ McCloy to Acheson, 15 November 1945, *ibid.*, 853.

in line with his policy at the end of 1945 of keeping the British at arm's length—a policy, incidentally, which was deeply resented in London.

So that one key document, I think, is perfectly consistent with my basic thesis in the article, and it's only by misinterpreting it—by making it seem that Byrnes actually wanted the Soviets to take part in the occupation of Japan—that Dr. Mark can use it to support the argument he makes in his comment.

What all this means, then, is that there's not much direct evidence to support Dr. Mark's argument about Byrnes. But perhaps the real point to be made here is that Byrnes played his cards very close to his chest—that he was not particularly up front with other State Department officials, let alone with the public at large, about what he was doing—and that as a result we don't have anything like the kind of evidence on Byrnes that we have on, say, Eisenhower or Kennedy or Kissinger. We thus have to rely, perhaps more than we would like, on inference and on judgments about the plausibility of different interpretations.

Sometimes those judgments take the documentary evidence as their point of departure. For me, the most important case of this sort had to do with the London foreign ministers' meeting of September 1945. When I read the records of that meeting in FRUS, I was amazed to see Byrnes telling Molotov over and over again that the arrangement that had been worked out for Poland should be taken as a model for dealing with the Romanian and Bulgarian questions (110-112). Those comments obviously had to be interpreted in the light of the fact that by that point key U.S. officials, including Byrnes, understood what was happening in Poland. It was, as I said in the article, "simply a question of putting two and two together. On the one hand, Byrnes was proposing that the Balkan issues be settled by taking the Polish settlement as a model. On the other hand, the Western governments were now under no illusions about what was going on in Poland" (112). It was clear that that country was well on its way to becoming a Communist police state. But Byrnes—again, astonishingly, given what we had been led to believe—did not object to what was going on there. Quite the contrary: "everyone was satisfied," he told Molotov, with the arrangement that had been worked out for Poland (110). So when he said that the Polish settlement should be used as a model for dealing with the Bulgarian and Romanian problems, the implications were hard to miss. If Byrnes had wanted to save representative government in Romania and Bulgaria, why would he give the Soviets the message that the U.S. government could accept what they had done, and were still doing, in Poland? Why would he give them the clear message that it would be okay for them to do the same thing in the two Balkan countries? To urge that the Polish settlement be taken as a model obviously implied that that kind of settlement was acceptable—that the United States could live with what was happening in Poland and would not object if the same sort of thing happened in Bulgaria and Romania. Dr. Mark says that Byrnes never signaled, even privately, that he was "willing to accept 'Communist regimes that were the instruments of Soviet control'" in eastern Europe. But looking at the records of Byrnes's meetings with Molotov in London in September 1945, it is hard to imagine how the signal could have been clearer.

Sometimes, however, those judgments about how the Byrnes policy is to be interpreted have to be made in a rather different way. You also have to try to think through whether a particular interpretation makes sense in its own terms. And for me the basic idea that Byrnes seriously thought that if only peace treaties could be signed in eastern Europe, the

occupations would end, the Soviets would withdraw their troops, and the countries there would again become free nations, is just not plausible. Treaties or no treaties, the Soviets would keep their troops there if they thought it was in their political interest to do so. The official occupation regime might end, but some basis for a continuing military presence could always be found if they wanted to find one. This sort of point strikes me as fairly obvious, and I find it hard to believe that someone as intelligent and as realistic as Byrnes did not see things in much the same way. It's hard to believe, that is, that he really thought that getting peace treaties signed would have a major effect—that it might actually lead to the end of Communist rule in the countries in question.

Finally, in trying to sort out these problems, you also have to make certain judgments about what American interests were, and thus about what U.S. leaders more or less had to be concerned with. Dr. Mark says that I assume “Byrnes operated in a perfect geopolitical vacuum,” that I just do not understand the role that balance of power considerations played in shaping American policy at the time. But I think it's pretty clear that, as I see it, geopolitical considerations lay at the heart of the Byrnes policy. That policy, at least as I interpret it, was obviously based on a certain sense for what America's geostrategic interests were—on the idea that the United States had a fundamental interest in making sure that the USSR did not take over western Europe, but did not have a basic strategic interest in keeping the Soviet Union from dominating eastern Europe. The Byrnes policy, to my mind at least, thus has to be understood in balance of power terms, and indeed I think it's quite clear that the core principle here, the idea that the division of Europe was something the United States could live with, was rooted in a realist world view. What else could it possibly have been based on? A policy of accepting, in the final analysis, a Communist-dominated eastern Europe could not have been based on moral considerations. At any rate, all these notions, I think, played a certain role in shaping the interpretation laid out in the article.

This brings me to the final point, which has to do with the larger importance of this whole story. What I took away from the work I did on this period was a strong sense that the real makers of U.S. foreign policy at the time—especially Byrnes, but to a certain extent Truman as well—were far more inclined to think in relatively amoral power political terms than I had been led to believe. I came away, that is, with the sense that what international relations theorists like Kenneth Waltz refer to as structural forces were a lot more powerful in 1945 than I had originally thought. This in fact was one of a handful of cases which convinced me that the realist theorists are on to something important, and that realism provides a very useful framework not just for understanding particular historical cases but also for thinking about international politics at a more general level.

But there is another side to the story. The international political system might lead key policy makers to pursue a certain type of policy, but they also have to operate within a domestic political system, a circumstance which virtually forces them to package their policy in a way their key domestic audiences will find palatable. There is, in other words, almost bound to be a gap between the real policy and the way it is presented in public, and that means that the historian normally has to make a certain effort to see below the surface and understand what was actually driving things. But as difficult as it can be at times, it's something which in principle can be done. If we proceed the right way, if we put our

various preconceptions aside, we can often reach conclusions we can have real confidence in, conclusions that can tell us something of fundamental importance about how international politics actually works.

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