

We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History (Council on Foreign Relations Book)

By John Lewis Gaddis

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Did the Soviet Union want world revolution? Why did the USSR send missiles to Cuba? What made the Cold War last as long as it did? The end of the Cold War makes it possible, for the first time, to begin writing its history from a truly international perspective. Based on the latest findings of Cold War historians and extensive research in American archives as well as the recently opened archives in Eastern Europe, the former Soviet Union, and China, *We Now Know* provides a vividly written, eye-opening account of the Cold War during the years from the end of World War II to its most dangerous moment, the Cuban missile crisis. *We Now Know* stands as a powerful vindication of US policy throughout the period, and as a thought-provoking reassessment of the Cold War by one of its most distinguished historians.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review
Was the Cold War inevitable? Was there an international communist conspiracy? Did Castro and Khrushchev beat Kennedy in the Cuban missile crisis? After combing through a mass of declassified and previously unavailable documentation to reconsider the collision of the American and Soviet empires, Yale professor Gaddis replies in the affirmative. Given Josef Stalin's convictions, the Cold War was inescapable: it is the choices that each side made that prove fruitful for historical research, and not the mere fact of the war, as Gaddis neatly demonstrates. The American empire--Gaddis's term--prevailed because, he says, "democracy proved superior to autocracy in maintaining coalitions," and not necessarily because of any technological or economic advantage. Gaddis dispels several misconceptions and urges that students of Cold War history should foremost "retain the capacity to be surprised."

From Booklist
"We" refers to "historians" of the cold war, and Gaddis has been one of the most notable. In this work, he synthesizes the recent scholarship growing out of the partial opening of Soviet archives relating to the cold war, up through the 1962 Cuban missile crisis. Gaddis' nuanced summary clarifies the hitherto knottiest problems of interpretation: divining Stalin's motives in communizing Eastern Europe; his role in starting the Korean War; and Khrushchev's bombastic gyrations of policy. To explain the origin of it all, Gaddis resurrects two indispensable factors: Stalin's suspicious, tyrannical personality and the Leninist ideology. Whatever the Americans did to make the cold war happen, Gaddis argues that the Soviet dictator's aims (and mistakes in pursuing them) virtually guaranteed a face-off. Nuclear weapons just ensured that the rigidity would endure until the fundamental of Stalinist rule, coercion, was repudiated. A magisterial overview that clarifies all issues of the cold war's origins. *Gilbert Taylor*

From Kirkus Reviews
An elegantly written, vivid history of the early years of the Cold War, culminating with the Bay of Pigs crisis. Noting that the flood of materials from archives in this country and abroad has substantially deepened, and sometimes considerably altered, scholars' view of events, veteran Cold War historian Gaddis (The United States and the Origins of the Cold War, 1972, etc.) has set out to provide an overview for a general audience of the leaders, policies, and international crises that shaped the late 1940s to the early '60s, concentrating on the two great antagonists, the US and the Soviet Union, and their leaders. While no one figure shaped the Cold War, Stalin came closest, injecting an obsessive paranoia, duplicity, and an aura of menace into the relations among postWW II states. ``Suspicion, distrust, and an abiding cynicism were," Gaddis observes, ``not only his preferred but his necessary environment." And while these qualities, along with an extraordinary capacity for cruelty, extended and preserved the USSR, they also, Gaddis argues, ensured its downfall. ``The killings Stalin authorized, the states he seized . . . the sphere of influence he imposed provided no lasting security for the Soviet Union." They inspired resistance that, when Soviet leaders lost the taste for repression, could not be contained. In a series of chapters on American and Russian conflicts in the third world, on the place of nuclear weapons in the uncertain balance of power, and on the increasingly uncomfortable relations between America and Russia and their respective allies, he does a superb job of synthesizing a wide range of sources, drawing clear and persuasive lessons from events. His reading of the motivations of figures as diverse as John F. Kennedy and Chairman Mao seems balanced and acute. Gaddis has written a lively, deeply informed summary, the most accessible and compelling guide to the international conflicts, issues, and dominant ideologies of the early Cold War era. -- *Copyright ©1997, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.*

Users Review

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