

# *Uncertain Empire:* Blaming America First

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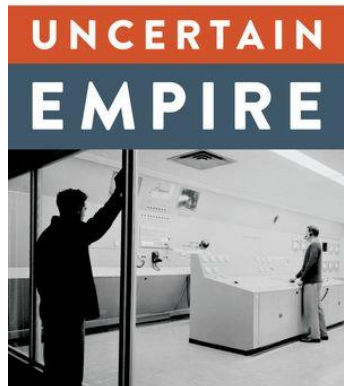
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Richard J. Evans notes that postmodernists believe that the purpose of history is not to search for objective truth, but to take a moral or political position. This approach has obvious dangers:

“Ultimately, if political or moral aims become paramount in the writing of history, then scholarship suffers. Facts are mined to prove a case; evidence is twisted to suit a political purpose; inconvenient documents are ignored; sources deliberately misconstrued or misinterpreted. If historians are not engaged in the pursuit of truth, if the idea of objectivity is merely a concept designed to repress alternative points of view, then scholarly criteria become irrelevant in assessing the merits of a particular historical argument. This indeed is the ultimate goal of some postmodernists.”<sup>1</sup>

AMERICAN HISTORY AND THE IDEA OF THE COLD WAR



EDITED BY JOEL ISAAC AND DUNCAN BELL

*Uncertain Empire: American History and the Idea of the Cold War*  
Edited by Joel Isaac and Duncan Bell  
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<sup>1</sup> Richard J. Evans, *In Defense of History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2000), 188.

*Uncertain Empire* is a collection of essays written by and for academic historians. The essays are, generally speaking, representative of the style of history that Evans describes. The book's overall goal is not objective truth but to represent America as the instigator of the Cold War, with the Soviet Union, China, and the Third World as passive victims who merely reacted to American aggression. The scholarship suffers accordingly. In this book, there are many examples of twisted evidence, ignored documents, and misinterpreted sources. The authors clearly do not believe that primary sources have much value, as they rarely use them. Very often, when they cite secondary sources, they either misinterpret the source, or it does not actually support their argument. Least relevant of all are their genuflections before the postmodernist icons: Baudrillard, Foucault, Jameson, Lakatos, Lyotard, etc. Given the paucity of evidentiary support on display, we must regard this book as propaganda, not traditional history. Much of it is written in a "rambling, opaque, and affected" style that is highly unappealing.<sup>2</sup> The contributors are astonishingly incapable of constructing clear, concise, and logical arguments – perhaps because doing so would make their errors and omissions more apparent. This is particularly shameful given their education and employment at prestigious universities.

Curiously, the authors in a book on "American History and the Idea of the Cold War" are predominantly foreign-born: a Swede, a Norwegian, an Israeli, four Britons, and only five Americans. In principle, foreign perspectives can provide valuable insight into American history. Alas, the foreign authors share with the American authors a grim, rigid ideological conformity that was clearly a prerequisite for inclusion in this volume. The editors excitedly note that the authors represent a "wide spectrum of regional specialisms and disciplinary commitments." Ideological diversity, on the other hand, is sadly lacking. The political commitments on display here preclude historical scholarship in the traditional sense of an open-

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<sup>2</sup> Evans notes on pages 57-59 and 172-173 that certain postmodernists write in this manner. He urges historians to write as clearly and unpretentiously as possible.

minded search for truth based on the evaluation of documented sources. This is not to say that politically committed scholars cannot write good history, only that this ideal is not achieved here. Instead, the evidence is tailored to fit the “predetermined explanatory scheme,”<sup>3</sup> and rival arguments are ignored or treated superficially rather than tackled directly and refuted.

Now let us examine the dismal contents.

The first chapter of the book is the most important chapter in the sense that all the other chapters refer to it and, with one exception, accept its arguments. Anders Stephanson, a professor of history at Columbia, insists that the Cold War “was from the outset not only a US term but a US project.” American elites created the Cold War for the “global purpose of putting the United States into the world once and for all” (26) and to crush domestic dissent:

“The cold war, then, was the manner in which the United States was able in peacetime to enter into the world of international politics on a global scale in the name of conducting a war short of actual war that had allegedly been declared by ‘International Communism.’ Domestically, the cold war as an always ready assumed structure of aggression imposed by totalitarian Moscow worked magnificently, again, to render virtually impossible any opposition to Washington’s license to act everywhere. A Republican Congress reluctant, all things being equal, to go along with governmental largesse in peacetime found itself flummoxed by the coldwar logic.<sup>4</sup> The Truman Administration knew this

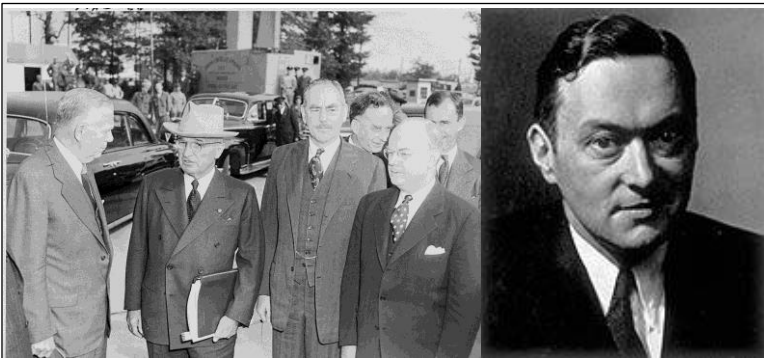
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<sup>3</sup> Evans, p. 65.

<sup>4</sup> The Republicans controlled Congress for only two of the almost eight years Truman was in office, and the 80th Congress strongly supported the administration’s internationalist initiatives. The idea that Truman promoted containment primarily to flummox isolationist Republicans is thus dubious at best. Did America really create the national security state in order to thwart Senator Robert Taft?

and instrumentally exaggerated without compunction the worldwide threat. This is why Acheson can be considered a 'meta-realist.' He saw quite lucidly that the cold war was a way to stamp out once and for all any postwar tendencies to 'isolationist' reversal." (34)

The author initially wastes several pages bloviating about semantics. For no good reason, he refuses to capitalize Cold War or Third World, and employs the annoying neologisms "coldwar" and "thirdworld" as adjectives. Regarding the term "the cold war," he contends that "each of the three words that make it up may in fact be put into question" (24). His efforts to question the term are not especially convincing, and given its wide acceptance and clear utility, the need for such questioning is itself questionable.



Who devised and implemented the strategy of containment –  
[Truman, Marshall, and Acheson...](#) or [Walter Lippmann](#)?

Stephanson examines Walter Lippmann's response to George F. Kennan's "Mr. X" article at some length. As Lippmann did not make American policy, but only commented on it, this digression does not advance the author's thesis on the origins of the Cold War. What Truman, Acheson, Byrnes, Marshall, and Forrestal thought about containment is self-evidently of far greater importance than what Lippmann thought. However, the author essentially ignores these

policymakers, and makes only a few dismissive references to NSC-68. He thus completely fails to provide convincing evidence for his central claim that the Cold War was an aggressive American project.

His examination of Stalin's foreign policy is similarly unsatisfying, as it relies on no primary sources or even on the numerous important secondary sources that evaluate Soviet strategy. Instead he simply asserts that Stalin was a "hyperrealist" devoted to defending the headquarters of world socialism against an "infinitely more powerful" enemy (33). It is astoundingly arrogant to claim that the Soviet Union never acted positively, but was only a passive object acted upon by America. The author's concept that Truman's strategy was offensive and Stalin's was defensive cannot survive much close analysis. Vladislav Zubok notes that after 1945, "the Kremlin's behavior became a major contributor to the Cold War"; Stalin had broad aspirations and vigorously probed for weakness.<sup>5</sup> Stephanson mentions this book in reference to Gorbachev, but ignores what it says about Stalin for the obvious reason that this information invalidates his thesis. A more recent work based on research in the Russian archives refutes the view that American aggression caused the Cold War: "The documents show, quite the contrary, that Moscow made all the first moves and that if anything the West was woefully complacent until 1947 or 1948, when the die was already cast."<sup>6</sup>

Stephanson contends that the United States, having demonized the Soviet Union as an evil totalitarian slave state, conducted no "real diplomacy" or "traditional diplomacy" with it.<sup>7</sup> He does not define these terms, but presumably he would only consider "real diplomacy" to be a continuation of Roosevelt's approach to Stalin – "give him everything I possibly can and ask nothing from him in return."<sup>8</sup> In reality, the United States was always diplomatically

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<sup>5</sup> Vladislav Zubok, *A Failed Empire* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 29.

<sup>6</sup> Robert Gellately, *Stalin's Curse* (New York: Knopf, 2013), 9.

<sup>7</sup> Other authors in the book also say this, e.g., Douglas on page 132.

<sup>8</sup> William C. Bullitt, "How We Won the War and Lost the Peace," *Life* (30 August 1948), 94.

engaged with the USSR, even from 1945 to 1963. What were four summit meetings, the Austrian state treaty, and the agreement to neutralize Laos if not traditional diplomacy? The lack of success in resolving outstanding grievances did not make this diplomacy any less real.

The author attacks the “periodization” of the Cold War. His principal objection to the idea that the Cold War ended in 1989 is that this necessarily reflects credit on Ronald Reagan, whom the author detests as a “far-right ideologue” (45). In Stephanson’s



Stephanson maintains America conducted no “real diplomacy” with the USSR from 1945 to 1963. What then were the summit meetings, like the 1961 [Vienna Summit](#) between Kennedy and Khrushchev?

view, the Cold War ended in 1963, most importantly because “nuclear weapons turn out to be very effective ideology killers” (35). His idea that nuclear weapons caused America or the USSR to realize the ideological “untruth of the cold war” after the Cuban Missile Crisis is simply laughable. The United States and the Soviet Union built the vast majority of their nuclear weapons *after* 1962 – roughly 10,000 warheads each – and each superpower deployed several new generations of delivery systems. The continuation of the strategic weapons competition for almost thirty years clearly indicated that the US-Soviet geopolitical and ideological contest – i.e., the Cold War – was far from dead after the Cuban Crisis.

The author’s second reason for considering that the Cold War ended in 1963 is the Sino-Soviet split:

“The idea of a territorialized monolith and simple binaries is blasted asunder. The dichotomy is dead.

The unavoidable corollary begins to emerge: preserving the coldwar frame is denying oneself the marvelous chance of playing the two communist antagonists off against each other... Even if some notion of intracommunist quarrels can be maintained within the coldwar orthodox view at the outset, it can certainly not be so once the PRC and the United States move into de facto alliance..." (36)

There is no reason at all to think the Cold War "certainly" could not be maintained with China allied to the United States. If one accepts the claim that America contrived the Soviet threat to justify intervention overseas to the domestic political audience, why should Sino-American amity eliminate this "false" justification? American hostility to China was never a prerequisite for the Cold War, which was already under way when the Red Chinese came to power in 1949. Truman made a strong effort to come to terms with Red China in 1949-50.<sup>9</sup> Had this effort succeeded, Truman would certainly have continued the policy of containment of the USSR that was already in place. The inclusion of China in the anti-Soviet coalition after 1969 did not "blast asunder" containment. On the contrary, Sino-American rapprochement made continued pursuit of containment possible despite the weakened American strategic position.<sup>10</sup>

The author considers that the Cold War ended in 1963 when the United States was forced to recognize the USSR's "legitimacy as a geopolitical actor" and no longer sought the "total destruction" of the Soviet system. That the US did not recognize Soviet legitimacy before 1963 is questionable. For one thing, Eisenhower would not have met Khrushchev three times if he thought the Soviet regime illegitimate. Moreover, despite some heated rhetoric, the United States never actually sought the total destruction of the Soviet system before 1963.

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<sup>9</sup> See chapters 1 and 3 of Richard C. Thornton, *Odd Man Out* (Washington: Brassey's, 2000).

<sup>10</sup> See the introduction and chapter 1 of Richard C. Thornton, *The Nixon-Kissinger Years* (New York: Paragon House, 1989).

By definition, the goal of containment was to contain, not destroy. The stated American objectives in NSC-68 were “to reduce the power and influence of the USSR” and to force the Soviet government “to conform with the purposes and principles set forth in the UN Charter” (which, after all, they had signed). Total destruction – “unconditional surrender, the subjugation of the Russian peoples or a Russia shorn of its economic potential” – was explicitly rejected. Notably, NSC-68 only talked about *strengthening* the “free world” economy, not about *weakening* the Soviet economy. As America never seriously tried to undermine the Soviet regime at any time between 1945 and 1981, the author’s conclusion that the Cold War ended when America stopped doing this in 1963 fails. In reality, the Cold War persisted until 1989 because the US *did not* seek to destroy the Soviet system until President Reagan took office.

Stephanson then wrangles with the problem of how to describe the events of 1964 to 1989 in light of his thesis that the Cold War ended in 1963. After some waffling, he states, “no single logic dominates or overdetermines the coming era in the same way as did the cold war.” Such arrant nonsense only shows he cannot manufacture a remotely convincing explanation. In fact, the basic logic of the US-Soviet competition dominated after 1964 just as it did before.

Stephanson concludes with a critique of Odd Arne Westad’s book *The Global Cold War*, which studies the superpower struggle in the Third World in the 1970s and 1980s. Westad’s work creates obvious problems for Stephanson’s idea. If the Cold War ended in 1963, how do we explain the readily apparent intensification and geographic expansion of the superpower struggle afterward? Stephanson accuses Westad of distorting history to avoid the thoughtcrime of Eurocentrism – a comical accusation coming from such a transparently ideological author. Stephanson believes that Westad’s “decentering” of the Cold War to omit Europe and the nuclear balance is wrong, and advocates “relentless and rigorous centering” of the history of the period on the United States. An



attempt to understand the Third World from 1965 to 1989 without reference to the superpowers is certainly meaningless. Still, Stephanson's criticism does not solve his problem. Indeed, "centering" raises an even more difficult problem for him. If the Cold War ended in 1963, what caused the US-Soviet nuclear arms race and the political struggles in Europe and the Far East after 1965? He completely ignores the vast literature on these subjects. Perhaps his undergraduate students are unaware that this literature exists, but more informed readers are sure to note his failure to address it.

He observes that Westad regards the Third World struggles of the 1970s and 1980s as a "continuation of colonialism by other means" rather than a product of the US-Soviet competition. In this view, "the meaning of the cold war has been reduced to nothing, where all conceptual value has been lost in a historical fog: the cold war as another name for western colonialism as it began in 1415" (43). Again, this evades the question of why the superpowers spent twenty-five years competing for influence in the Third World if the Cold War ended in 1963. His final, unsatisfying contention is that what ended in 1989 was not the Cold War but "the epoch precipitated by the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917" (44). What an amazing coincidence that the Bolshevik epoch should somehow come to an end right after the Reagan administration formulated and implemented a strategy to put the Soviet regime under intense military, economic, and political pressure!

Stephanson grumbles that his claim that the Cold War was "a US project" has met "little or no success" over the decades. He attributes this to intellectual intolerance – "convention rules OK." A better explanation for the lack of success of his argument is that *it is not true*. Judging by this chapter, his inability to make a cogent, well-supported case contributed to his lack of success.

The next chapter is Odd Arne Westad's brief rejoinder to Stephanson. He precisely diagnoses the infantile disorder of Leftist historians:

“For all its chastising of US foreign policy, part of the American Left – represented in this volume by Anders Stephanson<sup>11</sup> – has been as relentlessly US-centered in its approach to international affairs as the Right has been. While the Right... sees the rise of US global predominance as a cause for celebration, the Stephansonian Left sees it as the root of all evil. I do not use the latter expression as a cliché: for parts of the US (or in Stephanson’s case US-based) Left most devilishness in the postwar world was in some form or another caused by an immoral use of US power. From Korea to Vietnam to the Iraq-Iran War, the root cause of conflict was the policy of the United States.” (53)

Westad asserts that Stephanson’s “campaign for centering the Cold War exclusively on the United States is wrong-headed” (55). He rejects as “meaningless” the idea that the Cold War ended in 1963. More importantly, he explains that Stalin and Mao were not simply responding defensively in a “hyperrealist” fashion to American ideological initiatives. Instead, they had positive agendas grounded in their strategic and ideological beliefs. These three pages are the most valuable in the entire book.

Ann Douglas is a feminist professor of comparative literature at Columbia. Her chapter on the Russo-German war is a disgrace by traditional standards of scholarship. One wonders why the editors of this volume agreed to permit a contribution from someone with no evident expertise in the subject, and why Oxford University Press accepted such a grossly flawed product. Her views on World War II are not even original, but simply rehash what Soviet historians wrote during the Cold War. She produces poor evidence, or none at all, to support her claims. She examines no original sources. She misquotes her secondary sources, and attributes to them opinions that they do

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<sup>11</sup> In point of fact every author in this volume is a representative of the Left, some more extreme than others.

not have or that are the opposite of what they actually have. The result is an inversion of reality that is best described as fiction, not history.

Her basic thesis is that American Cold War movies and histories presented “distorted and self-glorifying depictions” of war in the European theater (115) and deliberately “buried the Soviet Union’s role in the war against Hitler” (116). The purported American motive was to represent the USSR and socialism as a total failure, rather than give them credit even for defeating Hitler. The US also wanted to assuage its “anxieties about its masculine image” (125). She regards this denial as a basic goal of the Cold War:

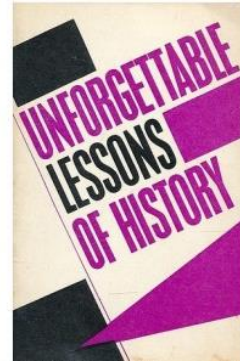
“The denial of Russia’s role in World War II was the foundational fiction, the place where the dishonesty that characterized the US’s Cold War top to bottom found part of its origins and *raison d’être*, the moment when America’s own ‘black legend,’ to appropriate Martin Malia’s term for Russia’s long-standing noir image in the world’s eyes, took off.” (135)

She does not identify how this “denial” occurred or who was responsible for it. Instead, she is content merely to assert that “the United States” denied Russia’s role, as if America was a monolithic entity with a centrally directed anti-Soviet line to which all historians adhered during the Cold War. This is a ridiculous projection onto an imaginary United States of the system of censorship and political control that *actually existed* in the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, she fantasizes that the United States denied history through “massive refusal of available information at the top” (117). In reality, errors and omissions in American histories of the Eastern Front directly resulted from a *Soviet* top-level political decision to deny Western researchers access to Moscow’s archives. In her imagination, heavily politicized American histories denigrated the Soviets. In reality, the *Soviets* wrote heavily politicized histories of the war that belittled the Americans and

British as politically untrustworthy and militarily irrelevant. That she inverts reality is self-evident to anyone with any historical knowledge.

The author does not specify when, during the Cold War, she thinks this “denial” occurred. The most charitable interpretation is that she believes it occurred from 1945 to 1963, but even this is not sustainable. The leading producer of historical works on the Eastern Front during this period was the United States Army, which from 1945 to 1954 alone produced *thousands* of studies on the German war effort.<sup>12</sup> These studies were by no means perfect, but certainly did not downplay the Soviet role in Germany’s defeat.<sup>13</sup> Soviet combat performance and methods were of intense interest for obvious reasons. The Army’s *The German Campaign in Russia: Planning and Operations*, published in 1955, was one of the very first books in English on Operation Barbarossa. This book notes that the Soviets inflicted 1,167,835 casualties on the Germans from June 1941 to April 1942,

thus crippling the German Army for the 1942 campaign. Furthermore, the Army’s official histories of the war were primarily written during this period. One might expect these histories to denigrate the Soviet role in the war, but this was far from the case. Of particular interest are the War Department volumes that examine the war as a whole.



*Unforgettable Lessons of History* (Moscow: Novosti Press, 1970) is a Soviet propaganda tract. Like Douglas, it accuses Westerners of deliberately writing anti-Soviet histories of the war, and denigrates the British and American contribution to victory in World War II.

<sup>12</sup> See *Guide to Foreign Military Studies 1945-54* (Headquarters, United States Army Europe, 1954).

<sup>13</sup> Modern historians often criticize the Army historical program for excessive reliance on German officers who whitewashed the Wehrmacht’s role in Eastern Front atrocities and who blamed Hitler alone for Germany’s defeat. Nonetheless, the Army would have been irresponsible not to utilize this important source of intelligence on its major potential enemy.

Far from denying the Soviet role in the war, these histories state that the Roosevelt administration believed the Soviet contribution was *absolutely essential* to victory, and that this conviction guided American decisions throughout the war.<sup>14</sup> The Army volume on D-Day, published in 1951, plainly acknowledges that the Soviets inflicted millions of casualties on the Germans, thus making the cross-channel assault possible, and shows that in June 1944 most of the Wehrmacht was deployed in the East.<sup>15</sup> The Army's professional journal, *Military Review*, by no means ignored the Eastern Front in this period. It published many articles on Barbarossa, Stalingrad, and Kursk, among other topics.<sup>16</sup> Thus, if anyone was denying the Eastern Front from 1945 to 1963, it was not the U.S. Army, the organization with the greatest incentive to minimize the Soviet contribution to the war.

The only evidence Douglas presents to support her primary thesis is Marshal Zhukov's complaint that the 1962 movie *The Longest Day* did not mention the Soviets or their 1944 summer offensive. *The Longest Day* was entertainment, not a documentary, and largely focused on the tactical events of D-Day. Thus, the lack of discussion of the Soviets or "big picture" strategic issues is unsurprising to a sensible observer. A movie set on or before June 6 had no reason to mention a Soviet offensive that did not happen until June 22. Moreover, Douglas fails to mention that *The Longest Day* was based on a book written by Cornelius Ryan, whose subsequent 1966 bestseller was about the Battle of Berlin.<sup>17</sup> So much for denial of the Eastern Front! Douglas

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<sup>14</sup> See Richard M. Leighton and Robert W. Coakley, *Global Logistics and Strategy, 1940-43* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1955), 551-552, Maurice Matloff and Edwin M. Snell, *Strategic Planning for Coalition Warfare 1941-1942* (Washington: GPO, 1952), 221-222, and Maurice Matloff, *Strategic Planning for Coalition Warfare 1943-1944* (Washington: GPO, 1959), 280-281.

<sup>15</sup> Gordon A. Harrison, *Cross-Channel Attack* (Washington: GPO, 1951), 141-143, 233-236, 471.

<sup>16</sup> See the April 1948, July 1950, June 1953, September 1953, December 1953, March 1955, November 1955, and September 1957 issues. The articles were of course subject to the limitations of the sources available at the time.

<sup>17</sup> Of *The New York Times* number one non-fiction bestsellers from 1945 to 1990, six were about World War II and two were about the Eastern Front, hardly a strong record of denial. They were: Eisenhower's *Crusade in Europe*, Churchill's *The Gathering Storm* (about 1939-40, when the Soviets were aiding Hitler), Walter Lord's *Day of Infamy*

does not explain how the United States somehow forced an Irish journalist to deny the Eastern Front, or why the United States failed to force him to do so in his next book. Nor does she explain how the United States influenced Darryl F. Zanuck to ignore the Soviets in the movie version of *The Longest Day*. But why explain when you can just uncritically repeat the Soviet line? A more reasonable interpretation is that Ryan and Zanuck were not ideologically hostile to the USSR, but simply used easily available sources – interviews with D-Day veterans – and correctly assessed that the subject of D-Day had tremendous commercial appeal in the United States and Britain. She levels the same complaint of ignoring the Soviets against the 1998 movie, *Saving Private Ryan*. To expect any discussion of the Eastern Front in a clearly fictional action movie about a squad of American soldiers in Normandy is preposterous. The movie did not even mention the British or the Canadians, let alone the Soviets. Again, the director's goal was not historical accuracy, but box office success.

Douglas's thesis is even less tenable for 1963 to 1991. Numerous high-quality histories of the Eastern Front were published during this period, and these books could hardly deny the obvious truth that the Soviets inflicted the overwhelming majority of the casualties on Germany. Douglas insists that the most notable historians of the Eastern Front were (and remain) not American, but German or British. She ignores numerous American historians of the Eastern Front; for example, Robert Citino, Walter Scott Dunn, Stephen Fritz, Bryan Fugate, Jonathan House, Jacob Kipp, Geoffrey Megargee, John Mosier, Dennis Showalter, Ronald Smelser, Gerhard Weinberg, Steven Zaloga, and Earl F. Ziemke. The one exception she admits – David Glantz – single-handedly refutes her thesis. Glantz has written scores of books and tens of thousands of pages clarifying the Soviet role in World War II, uncovering forgotten Eastern Front battles, and refuting the cliché of Soviet ineptitude. Further, the publications of the non-American historians of the Eastern Front were readily available in

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(about Pearl Harbor), Cornelius Ryan's *The Last Battle* (about Berlin 1945), Harrison Salisbury's *The 900 Days* (about the siege of Leningrad), and Ladislav Farago's *The Game of the Foxes* (about Nazi espionage).

the United States throughout the Cold War. These authors surely sold more books in the USA than they did in Europe. If the United States wanted to downplay the Soviet war effort, why was Glantz not silenced, and why were these books not suppressed?

Douglas quotes Glantz as stating that the United States deliberately underplayed the Soviet Union's decisive impact on the war. He did not say any such thing in *The New York Times* article she cites.<sup>18</sup> The article asserts, "The decisive impact of America's erstwhile ally was often deliberately underplayed in the West for political reasons." But, the article does not attribute this statement to anybody or identify any particular books guilty of political underplaying. This renders the claim suspect. Douglas also omits information from this article that contradicts her thesis. For example, it states that "military historians have always known that the main scene of the Nazis' downfall was the Eastern Front." It properly notes that the principal political reason for the Cold War obscurity of the Eastern Front is that Soviet archives were closed to Western researchers. It correctly observes that Soviet histories were heavily politicized; they were officially censored, ignored embarrassing facts such as military disasters, and lionized official heroes. In other words, the article shows that the Soviets actually did what Douglas falsely accuses the United States of doing. A basic scholarly obligation is to present opposing arguments fairly and to rebut them, rather than simply to ignore them or misrepresent them as Douglas does.

Especially ironic is that the only two books she singles out to criticize at length as examples of Cold War "denial" of the Eastern Front were written *after* the Cold War ended. This suggests she is not familiar enough with the historiography to find examples that support her case. Williamson Murray and Allan Millet's *A War to be Won* and Timothy Snyder's *Bloodlands* most certainly do not deny Russia's role in defeating Germany. In order to claim that they did so, Douglas significantly distorts their arguments.

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<sup>18</sup> Benjamin Schwarz, "A Job For Rewrite: Stalin's War," *The New York Times*, 21 February 2004.

Her critique of *A War to be Won* fails to mention that Murray and Millett repeatedly praise the Soviet military for waging “the most impressive ground campaigns of World War II” after 1941.<sup>19</sup> They favorably contrast the success of Operation Bagration to the Anglo-American failures in Normandy.<sup>20</sup> Her contention that they purposely understate Soviet civilian casualties is simply false; they provide two large estimates. She claims Murray and Millett say the Soviets lost 2 million civilians and that the real number is 16 to 18 million. Murray and Millett state on page 553 that 15 million Soviet civilians died, and then on the next page they say 28 to 40 million Russian and Chinese civilians died – clearly consistent with Douglas’s stated number. She asserts that they “omit the USSR from their list of nations that suffered large losses because of ‘strategic bombing’” (118). They do not ignore Soviet losses; they state that a million Russians died in the first year of the siege of Leningrad, and “the civilians of Moscow and Stalingrad fared only slightly better.”<sup>21</sup> Apparently, Douglas is unaware that military analysts generally define air attacks on fortified, besieged cities as tactical bombing. Strategic bombing consists of long-range attacks far from areas where ground forces are engaged – and neither Leningrad nor Stalingrad fit this description. Moreover, in the case of Leningrad, Soviet casualty figures do not distinguish between victims of bombing and victims of artillery fire.

Regarding *Bloodlands*, her accusation that Timothy Snyder seeks to “downsize the Russian republic’s military contribution and its suffering” (121) cannot survive a fair reading of his work. Snyder considers that the Red Army was tough and intelligently led, and that Russian civilian casualties alone were far larger than American and British casualties from all causes. He even argues that estimates of Russian casualties in Leningrad are too low. He observes that most of the fighting occurred in Poland, the Baltic States, Belarus, and Ukraine,

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<sup>19</sup> Williamson Murray and Allan R. Millett, *A War To Be Won* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2000), 20. Their praise for the Soviets is also noted in *The New York Times* article cited above.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 410 and 455.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 532.



not Russia, and that accordingly, most of the Soviet civilian casualties were Poles, Balts, Belarusians, and Ukrainians, not Russians.<sup>22</sup> Douglas finds these “Russophobic” observations offensive, even though they are both logical and indisputably true. She accuses Snyder of “bending geography” when he includes parts of Russia within the “Bloodlands.” She clearly does not understand how he defines the term, as she mistakenly thinks that it is only the area subject to the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact.<sup>23</sup> She accuses him of “speculation that the USSR might not have been able to withstand the German attack had Poland, Hungary, and Romania allied themselves with Hitler” (120). Such speculation is nowhere found on page x of *Bloodlands* as she claims. She thinks Snyder does not know that Romania and Hungary were German allies; he clearly states many times that they were. Finally, Douglas considers Snyder’s attack on the morality of Stalin’s strategic actions a “straw man.” She asks, “Who, precisely, anywhere, has given Stalin such a pass?” This is a truly ludicrous question given the vast number of Western apologists for Stalin. Those



[Joseph E. Davies](#), U.S. Ambassador to the USSR from 1936-1938, was one of the West’s many egregious apologists for Stalin. Davies argued that the victims of Stalin’s purges were guilty, and the Nazi-Soviet Pact and Soviet invasion of Finland were justified.

<sup>22</sup> Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands* (New York: Basic Books, 2010), 210, 277-278, 411, 501-502.

<sup>23</sup> Snyder defines the Bloodlands as “territories subject to both German and Soviet police power” on page 409. He specifically includes “the western fringe of Soviet Russia” (p. xi). His maps do not show the German-occupied regions east of Smolensk, in the Don bend, or in the North Caucasus as part of the Bloodlands, though they should. In any event, since Snyder invented the term, the Bloodlands is what he says it is, not what she says it is.

who gave Stalin a pass for the Nazi-Soviet Pact included, in 1939-41 alone, Walter Duranty, Joseph E. Davies, Eric Hobsbawm, I. F. Stone, Corliss Lamont, Anna Louise Strong, Pete Seeger, and Frederick L. Schuman.<sup>24</sup>

What Douglas fails to appreciate is that the comparative lack of American scholarship on the Eastern Front reflected not a government-directed conspiracy to deny history, but the low esteem in which American academia has held military history for over a century.<sup>25</sup> In the 1950s, at the height of the Cold War, military history was barely taught at all in American universities, and few graduate programs or tenure-track appointments existed.<sup>26</sup> The flagship publication of the historical profession, *The American Historical Review*, published exactly one research article on World War II between 1945 and 1990 – which was diplomatic not military history – and one additional article between 1991 and 2013.<sup>27</sup> The AHR published no articles about the operational conduct of the Vietnam War or Korean War anytime between 1950 and 2013. The conduct of other wars was similarly neglected.<sup>28</sup> The professional journal of the Organization of American Historians published only three articles on the conduct of World War II during the Cold War.<sup>29</sup> This journal published no articles on the conduct of the Korean or Vietnam Wars

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<sup>24</sup> On American academic apologists for Stalin and deniers of his crimes, see chapter one of John Earl Haynes and Harvey Klehr, *In Denial* (San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2005).

<sup>25</sup> See John A. Lynn, "The Embattled Future of Academic Military History," *The Journal of Military History*, 61.4 (1997), 777-789, David Maclsaac, ed., *The Military and Society* (Colorado Springs: Air Force Academy, 1972), 85-93, Louis Morton, "The Historian and the Study of War," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 49 (1962), 612-13, and Peter Paret, "The New Military History," *Parameters*, Autumn 1991, 10-18.

<sup>26</sup> Paret, p. 13.

<sup>27</sup> Vojtech Mastny, "Stalin and the Prospects of a Separate Peace in World War II," *The American Historical Review* (1972) 77(5), 1365-1388. Yukiko Koshiro, "Eurasian Eclipse: Japan's End Game in World War II" *The American Historical Review* (2004) 109(2), 417-444.

<sup>28</sup> Lynn, p. 780.

<sup>29</sup> Kent Roberts Greenfield, "Forging the United States Army into a Combined Arms Team" *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 34.3 (Dec., 1947), 443-452, Brian L. Villa, "The U. S. Army, Unconditional Surrender, and the Potsdam Proclamation," *The Journal of American History* 63.1 (June, 1976), 66-92, and Kenneth P. Werrell, "The Strategic Bombing of Germany During World War II: Costs and Accomplishments," *The Journal of American History* 73.3 (Dec., 1986), 702-713.

from 1950 to 2013 and no articles on the conduct of World War II after 1986. Quite clearly, what American academia detests most of all is so-called “drum and trumpet history” – that is, the type of analysis of the conduct of operations that in 1961, Walter Millis proclaimed had “lost its function” and should not even be taught to young military officers.<sup>30</sup> But *precisely* this kind of history allows us to understand the Soviet contribution to victory in World War II.

Why do American academics detest operational military history? Douglas regards the “denial” of the military history of the Eastern Front as a right-wing conspiracy to suppress facts that embarrass the United States. One wonders, if the United States was obsessively anti-Soviet during the Cold War, and dictated the academic historical agenda, how did Professor Douglas, her coauthors, and so many others like them ever get hired? In fact, American academics are overwhelmingly left-wing, as the authors in this book exemplify. They are thus ideologically hostile to military history, which they have always regarded as the province of the “politically right-wing, morally corrupt, or just plain dumb.”<sup>31</sup> This epistemic closure is the reason for any “denial” of Eastern Front military history. Cold War American academics did not ignore the Soviets in order to focus on the Americans in World War II. Rather, they ignored the military activities of every country in World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War. This attitude also explains why American scholars of the Eastern Front “have concentrated almost exclusively on the Jews killed in the Holocaust” (118). Holocaust Studies are a subset of the “social history” that American academia finds politically palatable. Holocaust scholars are far more likely to obtain jobs and tenure than military historians. Why Douglas even complains about the emphasis on the Holocaust is unclear given that she considers that the “study of the Final Solution” should be “a primary task for historians of World War II” (122).

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<sup>30</sup> David A. Charters, ed., *Military History and the Military Profession* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1992), xiv.

<sup>31</sup> Lynn, p. 778.

Douglas insists that America “suppressed” the history of the Eastern Front partly out of “gender anxiety” and “war envy.” Cold War Americans supposedly feared that the Russians were more masculine because they suffered much greater losses during the war, and envied Russia its wartime death and destruction.<sup>32</sup> She does not support this amateurish psychological analysis in any remotely persuasive manner. She does not name any specific men who directed the purported effort to suppress the history of the Eastern Front, nor provide any evidence of any individual’s sexual insecurity. An argument based on the unproven psychology of unnamed and probably non-existent men is shockingly poor scholarship to say the least. Her sole example of gender-anxious language is Eleanor Roosevelt’s declaration that “Stalingrad makes me ashamed.” As Eleanor Roosevelt was neither a Cold Warrior nor a man, this quote hardly demonstrates that American Cold Warriors feared for their manhood. Given the absence of supporting evidence, Douglas’s theory of “war envy” does not even rise to the level of a “new interpretation of the facts.” It is sheer fiction! One could more credibly argue that American Cold Warriors viewed Soviet losses with contempt; the losses proved Soviet technological backwardness, military incompetence, and political brutality. As George C. Scott’s character in *Dr. Strangelove* put it, the Russians were a “bunch of ignorant peons” who had “guts” but were “short of know-how.”



After 1945, the Soviets often scoffed at the importance of lend-lease. Recent scholarship has shown that British lend-lease tanks like this [Valentine II](#) played a major role in the Battle of Moscow. U.S. lend-lease supplies greatly assisted Soviet offensives from 1943-45.

<sup>32</sup> In a footnote, she writes, “Even in the Asian war, American losses, while heavier than in Europe, were small next to the Japanese totals” (137). Wrong! American losses were far higher in Europe than in the Pacific. And what is her point here? Does she think America envied the manliness of Japan’s casualties, too?

Her dismissive attitude towards Allied lend-lease echoes that of Soviet historians and politicians.<sup>33</sup> She lavishly praises Roosevelt's policy of appeasing Stalin as the proper response to what she considers was the inevitable and justified Soviet domination of Eastern Europe. Such apologies have been heard many times before. She does not show that her lengthy exaltation of Roosevelt and denunciation of Truman support her claims that American Cold Warriors denied Russia's role in the war and that American Cold Warriors were sexually insecure. If Roosevelt was right about the Soviets and Truman was wrong, does this automatically indicate that Cold Warriors suppressed history and were sexually anxious? No! Additional evidence is needed, and Douglas utterly fails to provide it. But then, this entire chapter is a farrago of logically unconnected claims, some true but most untrue, with weak or nonexistent evidence and a false conclusion.

Douglas maintains that unlike Cold War Americans, "by temperament and principle, Roosevelt was immune to the US's addiction to threat inflation" (127). Not quite! Roosevelt unquestionably inflated the Nazi threat to the Western Hemisphere before Pearl Harbor. Germany lacked the power to cross the English Channel, and had no capability whatsoever to project power across the Atlantic. Nonetheless, Roosevelt publicly warned that the Nazis intended to bomb and invade the United States.<sup>34</sup> Japan had even less military capability, but Roosevelt's absurd overinflation of the Japanese threat to the West Coast resulted in the internment of Japanese-Americans. Thus, Roosevelt was certainly not immune to threat inflation – he just inflated *different* threats from the Cold Warriors. Evidently Douglas finds Roosevelt's imaginary Nazi and Japanese threats to America more credible than the Soviet nuclear threat that *actually existed* after 1949. Douglas is oblivious to the illogic of her belief that the Nazis were a real threat to America but the Soviets were not. If the Nazis were a real threat, then the Soviets,

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<sup>33</sup> See chapter 6 of Alexander Hill, *The Great Patriotic War of the Soviet Union, 1941-45: A Documentary Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2009). As late as 1985, Mikhail Gorbachev disparaged American wartime aid to Secretary of State George Shultz.

<sup>34</sup> For example, see Roosevelt's "Arsenal of Democracy" speech of 29 December 1940.

whom she believes defeated the Nazis without any significant Allied assistance, were surely an even greater threat. If the Soviets were not a real threat, then how could the Nazis, who were too weak to defeat the Soviets or the British, be a real threat?

In conclusion, Douglas contends that “misleading language, startling omissions, and outright misinformation still crop up routinely in American scholarly discussions of the Eastern Front” (118). This statement applies in spades to her own essay, and describes her work better than that of anyone she attacks. Full discussion of her errors and distortions would require far more space.<sup>35</sup>

An instructive contrast to Douglas is the vastly superior paper that David Glantz wrote in 1986.<sup>36</sup> He acknowledges that parochialism and bias affected American perspectives on the Eastern Front, but attributes this primarily to “a natural concern for one's own history” and to the demands of the American reading public, who mainly wanted information about America’s past. He further notes that language barriers, lack of access to Soviet sources, and distrust of highly politicized Soviet works influenced American perspectives.

In another chapter of *Uncertain Empire*, John Thompson, a professor of American History at Cambridge, contends that the Truman administration’s conception of an America in mortal danger was a myth. Yet bizarrely, he barely discusses threat perceptions under Truman. He primarily attacks the idea that “balance of power” considerations never determined US foreign policy before 1945. His

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<sup>35</sup> More examples: she contends “France had more or less consented to its own occupation” (117) – half a million French and German casualties indicate otherwise. This too is a Soviet notion. At Tehran, Stalin insisted that France had not been militarily defeated but had “opened the front” to the German armies. She claims that “the USSR became the sole European power the Wehrmacht was not able to conquer or hold at bay” (123) – Britain was the other such power. She makes the hilariously ignorant statement that invading people is not a Russian tradition (130). How did Russia expand sixfold in size between 1500 and 1900 without invading anyone?

<sup>36</sup> David Glantz, [“American Perspectives on Eastern Front Operations in World War II,”](#) Foreign Military Studies Office, 1986.

case is not entirely without merit, but the editors should have demanded that he stick to the book's ostensible subject, the Cold War.

Thompson contends that the basic "axioms" of American Cold War foreign policy originated "not in the actions of the Soviet Union but in the long-running internal debate over whether the United States really needed to play a role in international politics commensurate with the scale of its power and resources" (91). Such a claim clearly demands examination of the actions and capabilities of the Soviet Union. No such examination is found in this chapter. Instead, the Soviet threat is dismissed as "underdetermined by reality" – a pretentious way to say that insufficient evidence existed that the Soviets were threatening. Since Thompson does not analyze the evidence for and against the Soviet threat, this argument fails by default. Nor does he truly examine what Americans thought about the Soviet threat from 1945 to 1950. He mentions the abundant evidence of geopolitical thinking in the documents of policymakers in this period, but then wanders off into an irrelevant discussion of American intervention in the Third World from 1950 to 1991. Yes, America intervened in the Third World after 1950. No, this does not prove that the American concern over the Soviet threat to Europe had no basis in "hard-headed geopolitical calculations" or that the Soviet threat was not real. Thus, Thompson's argument again fails due to lack of supporting evidence or analysis.

Thompson argues at length that the balance of power in Eurasia was not actually threatened before 1945 and that Americans did not really care about it. He dismisses the plentiful evidence that prominent Americans were concerned about the Eurasian balance of power before 1945 with a wave of the hand. His view is that interventionists artificially generated concern for the geopolitical balance in order to persuade their countrymen to intervene in Europe. His dubious opinion that the German threats in 1917 and 1941 were insufficient to justify American intervention on grounds of geopolitical realism is particularly grotesque coming from a Briton. One need not accept overinflated claims of a German threat to the Western

Hemisphere in order to believe that a Wilhelmine or Nazi-dominated Europe was not in America's geopolitical interest. Similarly, one need not fear a *Red Dawn*-style Soviet assault on America in order to conclude that Soviet domination of Eurasia was not in America's geopolitical interest. Nevertheless, Thompson considers that containment reflected not objective strategic necessity but the aggressive desire to assert American interests worldwide. In his view, a "realistic" Truman could have retreated to the Western Hemisphere and relied on nuclear weapons to ensure American security. Few American geopolitical realists in the late 1940s would have agreed with this strategy; Stalin would certainly have been delighted.

In sum, Thompson does not establish that the balance of power in Eurasia was not threatened from 1900 to 1989, or that American policymakers did not genuinely care about the geopolitical balance, or that there was no genuine Soviet threat to security in Eurasia. Consequently, his basic claim that the geopolitical vision underlying containment was wholly contrived to justify American interventionism remains unproven. Of course, since this thesis is fundamentally untenable, he could not have proven it even if he had bothered to support it with additional evidence and analysis.

Philip Mirowski's chapter is a fine example of what Alan Sokal calls the postmodernist abuse of science. According to Sokal, such abuse includes "importing concepts from the natural sciences into the humanities and social sciences without giving the slightest conceptual or empirical justification [and] displaying a superficial erudition by shamelessly throwing around technical terms in a context where they are completely irrelevant."<sup>37</sup> Mirowski, a professor of economics and the history and philosophy of science at Notre Dame, imports a concept from computer science – the "closed-world ontology" – and with little justification applies it to the organizations, processes, and intellectual history of American Cold War social and natural science. Mirowski's turgid, jargon-laden prose certainly displays a superficial

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<sup>37</sup> Alan Sokal and Jean Bricmont, *Fashionable Nonsense* (New York: Picador, 1998), 4-5.



erudition. Alas, his belief that “closed world ontologies were ubiquitous in Cold War thought” is, like many other claims in this book, asserted without any convincing evidence. Anyone outside the provincial realm of academic “science studies” is unlikely to find this chapter useful or interesting.

Steven Belleto’s chapter argues that the Cold War had a far greater influence on literature than examination of works that explicitly reference Cold War politics would suggest. He cites scholars who investigate the ways in which containment, game theory, and intervention in the Third World were manifested in popular culture. Belleto considers that language and literature have political uses. Unfortunately, his chapter fails to explore the connection between the historical profession’s abandonment of any pretense at objectivity and the political goals of the American Left. The Left’s arguments were (and are) unsustainable on the basis of facts and objectivity as traditionally understood. Therefore, the Left shifted the basis for the evaluation of arguments away from truth and objectivity and towards politics and emotions. Postmodernism is an effort to put Leftist academics in a dominant position as the arbiters of the struggle over the past – which they will evaluate on moral, political or emotional grounds – in order to control the present and the future.<sup>38</sup>

Two chapters look at Cold War religious issues. Andrew Preston of Cambridge contends that the promotion of religious liberty was of great importance to American foreign policy when US-Soviet tensions were high. Paul Boyer, formerly at the University of Wisconsin, presents a good summary of the religious and ethical debate over nuclear weapons during the Cold War. However, he notes the marginal relevance of this debate. Religious and ethical discourse never reflected the attitudes of the American people towards nuclear weapons, and rarely influenced policymakers or strategists. Comparatively speaking, Preston and Boyer support their arguments well and express themselves clearly.

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<sup>38</sup> See Evans, p. 176.

The remaining essays concern subjects so picayune that their inclusion in the volume is puzzling. Daniel Matlin of Kings College examines the “ideas of freedom” held by Ralph Ellison and Albert Murray. Moshik Tempkin of Harvard vainly strives to attach significance to an obscure episode – what William F. Buckley and John Dos Passos wrote in the 1960s about the Sacco and Vanzetti case. Peter Mandler of Cambridge argues that American Cold War anthropologists escaped the clutches of the national security state. Judging from this essay, the postwar military was wise to give up in disgust on behavioral science. Sharon Ghamari-Tabrizi, a Buddhist minister, investigates the problem of monotony among Cold War air defense radar operators. In the process, she buries the small nugget that is of slight interest – what the Air Force thought about crew fatigue in the 1950s – under a giant heap of “science studies” twaddle.

In conclusion, this book is the antithesis of the traditional principle that historians should impartially assess the primary sources in order to reconstruct past reality as fairly and truthfully as possible. This traditional historical method emerged partly in order to counter the corruption of history by political and religious partisanship. The lure of such partisanship remains as strong as ever, not least because historians who construct a false history of past American policy that reflects their ideological preferences invariably seek to use that history to influence present and future policy. As this book exemplifies, the history of the Cold War is surfeited with works that assume America was the root of all evil. It is high time that more objective accounts prevail. An objective assessment of American strategy in the 20th century is not only possible, but critically necessary now that the nation is on the verge of another strategic watershed.