

of political writers were devoted to propaganda. But propagandists were not the only ones to choose their words for political purposes. Political practitioners did so as well, and often without realizing that the words they chose trapped them in dogma, fantasy, or fog.

1

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## Origins of the Cold War, 2010

Heonik Kwon is a modern specialist on Korean and Cold War history. He is one of a growing number of Cold War scholars who are examining the many "hot wars" that were caused by the "cold" conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union. In this selection he mentions the Korean War, but he is mainly concerned with examining the causes of the Cold War. How, according to Kwon, does the establishment of a beginning date and cause of the Cold War become a moral issue? What alternate starting dates for the Cold War does Kwon discuss? Which of these do you find most convincing? How do the ideas of George Kennan and J. Edgar Hoover help us understand the causes of the Cold War?

### THINKING HISTORICALLY

One goal of propaganda is to convert rational analysis into powerful emotions, frequently fear. How do the writings included here of Kennan, Hoover, and Eisenhower do this? The line between propaganda and self-delusion can be very thin. Do you think these important people believed what they said? How did the Cold War psychology become so pervasive?

The story of the cold war, like that of any other war in human history, begins somewhere and ends somewhere. There is no consensus about the question of beginning. The origin of the cold war is an unsettled issue that continues to engender instructive debate among historians. Reflecting on the diverse ways to think about the origin of the cold war means rethinking the political history of the twentieth century and therefore considering the changing conditions of the contemporary

Source: Heonik Kwon, *The Other Cold War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 31-73.

world in new historical perspectives. However, this openness to historical reasoning and imagining does not extend to the other end of the story. There is a strong consensus in contemporary literature that the end of the cold war is a *fait accompli*, a universal historical reality. The question of the end has no room for diversity and generates no such positive interpretive controversies like those about the origin. The story of the cold war we tell ourselves today, therefore, has an open-ended beginning and a closed ending.

The term *cold war* refers to the prevailing condition of the world in the second half of the twentieth century, divided into two separate paths of political modernity and economic development. In a narrower sense, it means the contest of power and will between the two dominant states, the United States and the Soviet Union, that (according to George Orwell, who coined the term in 1945) set out to rule the world between them under an undeclared state of war, being unable to conquer one another. In a wide definition, however, the global cold war also entails the unequal relations of power among the political communities that pursued or were driven to pursue a specific path of progress within the binary structure of the global order. The "contest-of-power" dimension of the cold war has been an explicit and central element in cold war historiography; in contrast, the "relation-of-domination" aspect has been a relatively marginal, implicit element. The debates about the origins of the cold war contribute to disclosing how complex the great bifurcation in the project of modernity has been for both nations and communities. The origin of the cold war is not merely a question of time but also, in significant measure, a moral question: Which side of the bipolarized human community was more responsible for bringing about the global order and engendering political and military crises? The moral question is intertwined with the chronological one, and their connectedness is more apparent in places where the bipolar conflict was waged in a violent form.

Imagining the political future of Korea, for example, is inseparable from locating the origin of the Korean War. For people who date the origin of the war to 1950, the culpability for the devastating civil war rests unquestionably with the northern Communist regime, which launched, with endorsement and support from Mao Zedong and Joseph Stalin, an all-out surprise offensive against the southern territory in June of that year. For those who trace the war's origin to earlier years, the blame is apportioned equally to the belligerent, strongly anti-Communist southern regime, which instigated a series of border skirmishes and crushed domestic radical nationalist forces in a ruthless manner from 1947 to 1950. The latter measure provoked the outbreak of armed partisan activities in parts of the southern territory, which were effectively in a state of war from 1948 on. For those who associate the origin of the Korean

War with the end of the Pacific War in 1945, however, the main responsibility for the civil war lies instead with the United States and the Soviet Union, which partitioned and separately occupied the postcolonial nation after the surrender of Japan. (And we should add to these divergent views the official position taken by North Korea, which continues to paint its part in the war as an act of self-defense against the unprovoked aggression from South Korea, orchestrated by the United States, despite a wealth of evidence that points to the contrary.) These diverse perspectives on the origin of one of the first violent manifestations of the bipolar global order are not merely matters of scholarly debate. They are also deeply ingrained in the society that endured what was at once a civil war and an international war, provoking heated public debate and developing conflicting political voices and forces. In this context, the origin of the cold war is largely the origin of the war-induced wounds felt in the society, thereby making the very concept of a "cold" war somewhat contradictory, so that claiming a particular version of the origin is simultaneously an act of asserting a particular vision of the nation's history and future.

In the wider terrain, too, the cold war's temporal identity continues to be revised as to the question of its origin. Conventional knowledge associates the origin of the cold war with the end of World War II and the breakdown of the wartime alliance between the Western powers and the Soviet state. However, several scholars have challenged this conventional view. For example, Melvyn Leffler retraces the origin to the period following the Russian Revolution of 1917, whereas William Appleman Williams famously argues that the seeds of the cold war were sown much earlier, during the nineteenth-century contest for global supremacy between the established European imperial powers and the newly rising American power. Each of these revisions of the cold war's origin is simultaneously an attempt to reinterpret the meaning of the global conflict in modern history. Leffler's scheme foregrounds the importance of ideology (the antagonistic view to communism as a radically alien way of life incompatible with the market-based liberal world) in the construction of the cold war global order, whereas Williams shows how the perception of the alien ideological other mirrored for the United States at the turn of the twentieth century the nation's own ideological self-image defined in terms of so-called Manifest Destiny—the idea that America, as a sole benevolent and progressive power, confronts the backward and confused world infested with imperialist excess and colonial miseries. . . .

Two important documents of the early cold war show how the ideological "other" was imagined both from within and from without. George Kennan, an American diplomat considered the "father of containment

policy,” wrote in his famous “Long Telegram” sent from the U.S. Embassy in Moscow to the U.S. State Department in February 1946:

At bottom of [the] Kremlin’s neurotic view of world affairs is the traditional and instinctive Russian sense of insecurity. Originally, this was the insecurity of a peaceful agricultural people trying to live on a vast exposed plain in the neighborhood of fierce nomadic peoples. To this was added, as Russia came into contact with the economically advanced West, fear of more competent, more powerful, more highly organized societies in that area. . . . For this reason they have always feared foreign penetration, feared direct contact between [the] Western world and their own, feared what would happen if Russians learned the truth about the world without or if foreigners learned the truth about the world within. And they have learned to seek security only [in] a patient but deadly struggle for total destruction of rival power, never in compacts and compromises with it.

In September of the same year, J. Edgar Hoover, director of the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation, spoke at the San Francisco Conference of the American Legion:

During the past five years, American Communists have made their deepest inroads upon our national life. In our vaunted tolerance for all peoples the Communist has found our “Achilles’ heel.” . . . The Communist Party in this country is not working for the general welfare of all our people—it is working against our people. It is not interested in providing for the common defense. It has for its purpose the shackling of America and its conversion to the Godless, Communist way of life. . . . We, of this generation, have faced two great menaces in America—Fascism and Communism. Both are materialistic; both are totalitarian; both are anti-religious; both are degrading and inhuman. In fact, they differ little except in name. Communism has bred Fascism and Fascism spawns Communism. Both are the antithesis of the American belief in liberty and freedom. If the peoples of other countries want Communism, let them have it, but it has no place in America.

Kennan highlighted the “traditional and instinctive Russian sense of insecurity”: just as their “neurotic” leaders ruthlessly destroyed all domestic oppositions to their rule, he argued, so would they act in a similar fashion toward their defined enemies abroad. Kennan’s “Long Telegram” was mainly about the threats to the West’s security in the international sphere, and it was Hoover who epitomized the flip side of the “two-pronged policy of containment”—the commitment to containing communism both at home and abroad. In his book *A Study of Communism*, Hoover explored what he called the biggest mystery of his time: “How anyone who enjoys the rights and privileges of

American citizenship [can] bring himself to join a [Communist] movement which is such an outspoken foe of our entire way of life."

As the views of these influential state officials were circulated and were becoming a consensus in policy circles and public opinion, by the end of 1946 "the basic Cold War psychology" was taking hold of the U.S. administration. The Soviet maneuvers in northern Iran and incursions to the Turkish border in 1946 strengthened the belief in the United States that the Russians were hell bent on expansion and that only a united, preponderant counterforce could stop it. At the same time, Stalin encouraged the idea of encirclement by hostile Western forces to justify his brutal terror campaigns against his own population. The rise of the so-called cold war security culture was to a large measure, according to Mary Kaldor, a reciprocal action between opposing powers and had an "inertial logic" of mutually reinforcing external threats and internal fears. She argues that the construction of the cold war was thus a "joint venture" between the contending political blocs.

Hoover stated that "if the peoples of other countries want Communism, let them have it, but it has no place in America." It is argued in recent studies that American foreign politics in the mid-twentieth century was based on a broad bipartisan compromise between the Republican-dominated militancy against domestic labor and civil rights activists and the largely Democrat-led initiatives to aggressively counter communist threats in foreign soils. These studies show that although the U.S. administration perceived the threats of communism to be coming both from within the society and from overseas, the formulation of security threats was initially complicated by bipartisan politics in which competing groups lay emphasis on either the domestic dimension or the foreign dimension of containment. These two dimensions of perceived communist threats gradually merged into a rhetorical whole; the polemics against the enemy within (such as Hoover's) and the polemics against the external enemies (such as Kennan's) became increasingly indistinguishable. In the beginning of the 1960s, therefore, Hoover advocated tactical measures against overseas Communist threats to Asia and Europe, whereas Kennan lamented the lack of spiritual vigilance and tactical solidarity against communism within the Western world. Hence, we should add to Kaldor's idea of "joint venture" another dimension—the vision of the ideological enemy inside and the vision of the enemy outside colluded with each other, thereby augmenting the intensity of anti-Communist politics.

Dwight D. Eisenhower aptly summed up the emerging Manichean worldview in his inaugural speech in 1953: "The forces of good and evil are massed and armed and opposed as rarely before in history. Freedom is pitted against slavery; lightness against the dark." This anti-Communist worldview drew on an epidemiological model of society as a vulnerable organism. Hoover saw communism as "a condition akin to disease that

spreads like an epidemic and like an epidemic a quarantine is necessary to keep it from infecting the nation." In 1950, an important report from the U.S. National Security Council known as NSC-68 described the Soviet Union as aiming to "contaminate" the Western world by means of its preferred technique of infiltrating "labor unions, civic enterprises, schools, churches, and all media for influencing opinion." The document argued that, in parallel with the urgency to stop domestic contagion, there was a need internationally "to quarantine a growing number of [states] infected [by the disease of communism]."

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