George F. Kennan's Memoirs


Although George Kennan's memoirs at first glance belong to history rather than contemporary political thought, reading these two volumes invokes a recurring sense of *deja vu*. The concepts and images of the early postwar years, gradually eclipsed in the two decades bracketed by the Kennedy and Carter administrations, have re-emerged as the conventional wisdom behind a resurgent political conservatism personified in the two-term presidency of Ronald Reagan.

The debates of the late 1970s and 1980s over first principles in American foreign policy, like the policy itself, bear a certain resemblance to the debates of the late 1940s and 1950s. Indeed, many of the same issues raised at the inception of the Cold War were simply resurrected and updated.

In that original Cold War debate, Kennan stands out as a major figure. Although popularly identified as one of the principal architects of the Cold War "containment" policy, he has long since disavowed both the policy itself and his landmark "X-Article" (*Foreign Affairs*, July 1947) which remains synonymous with that policy. He quit the Foreign Service in August 1950 after a diplomatic career that spanned a quarter-century and encompassed the rise of National Socialism in Weimar Germany, the Stalinist collectivization and purges, the Nazi takeover of Austria and Czechoslovakia, the outbreak and denouement of World War II, and finally, the advent of the Nuclear Age and the Cold War.

*Kennan's memoirs were reprinted in paperback by Pantheon Books in 1983. The Pantheon edition of *Memoirs: 1950-1963*, which contains a brief postscript written by Kennan in 1983, was used in the preparation of this article. Throughout, I have designated the first volume, dealing with the years 1925-1950, as "I" and the second, dealing with the period 1950-1963, as "II".*
Moreover, by some strange twist of fortune—whether incredibly good or bad is difficult to say—Kennan was actually present at the scene, so to speak, in every case.

Kennan's disillusionment with the direction of American diplomacy at the half-century mark is a matter of record. "Never before," he wrote, "has there been such utter confusion in the public mind with respect to U.S. foreign policy." The President, the Congress, the public and the press "all wander around in a labyrinth of ignorance . . . ." (I, 500) His decision to leave government at the age of 46 was the result of cumulative frustrations that finally reached a climax in 1947-1950 when he served as the director of the newly created Policy Planning Staff. His first volume of memoirs, which discusses this seminal period in depth, appeared 17 years after that bitter first separation at a time when the Vietnam War was beginning to tear the fabric of American society and call into question the premises and assumptions on which containment was based. Another 17 years have since passed and although Vietnam is now only a bad memory, many of the issues it raised-issues also raised in the memoirs under review—are again at the center of the perennial debate over U.S. foreign policy.

How should these extraordinary memoirs be read today? As history? (Kennan's credentials as a prize-winning historian are well-established.) As political philosophy? (Kennan has a penchant for deriving general principles from specific events.) Perhaps even as literature? (Kennan's prose is laced with poetic imagery and an elegance rarely found in non-fiction.) Kennan himself provides a clue at the end of the first volume where he reproduces a passage written in 1950 as he was preparing to leave Washington for Princeton. "It seems to me," he wrote, "[that] no one in my position can contribute very much more . . . unless he first turns historian, earns public confidence and respect through the study of an earlier day, and then gradually carries the public up to a clear and comprehensive view of the occurrences of these recent years." (I, 500) Kennan's career over the past 35 years has been an attempt to act out this self-ordained role. Seen in this light, Kennan's memoirs are part of a plan in which the writing of history is no mere academic exercise. Rather, it is a means to a policy end—namely the re-channelling of American foreign policy.

What follows is a synopsis of Kennan's memoirs in which the reviewer has made a conscious effort to let Kennan speak for himself in adequate measure to allow the reader to judge both the works
under review and the critique here presented. *Memoirs: 1925-1950* will be discussed in Part I and *Memoirs: 1950-1963* in Part II. Part III presents a critical evaluation of Kennan's memoirs as the political testament they were intended to be. Of course, dozens of commentaries on Kennan's writings—including his memoirs—have been published. The criticisms they contain are too numerous and varied to be treated comprehensively here, but several of the more incisive, general criticisms can be summarized briefly: (1) Kennan lacks intellectual depth—he is a man of words, not ideas; (2) Kennan lacks philosophical depth—in the words of the eminent historian, Herbert Feis, "his fluency may lead his thoughts by the nose" (*Virginia Quarterly Review*, Winter 1968, 136); (3) Kennan was never able to match effort with efficacy—his career as a professional diplomat and later as a policy critic has been a prolonged exercise in futility; and (4) Kennan's memoirs show him to be ambivalent, inconsistent and subjective in treating many of the key events in which he was personally involved. This last criticism has been fortified by a plethora of specific criticisms, including the charge that he was blindly anti-Stalinist during most of his years in the Foreign Service, that he was far more sympathetic to the Germans than to the Russians even at the height of World War II, and that he was (is) too harsh in his treatment of FDR's (and Truman's) foreign policy—especially *vis-a-vis* the Soviet Union—at the crucial Yalta and Potsdam meetings.

The argument advanced here is that while all of the aforementioned criticisms may have merit, none captures the full measure of Kennan's failure as a political actor. If these memoirs prove anything, it is that Kennan sought not merely to record or interpret the political history of his era but to shape it. Such is the calling not of the scholar but of the statesman. If, indeed, Kennan's purpose was to make the world a different (and presumably better) place—using the enormous power of the U.S. government as his instrument—then he clearly failed. Moreover, the one legacy he can, with considerable justification, claim to have had a hand in creating—namely, the policy of "containment"—he has disavowed, contending it was all a colossal misunderstanding of his original intent.

In the judgment of the present writer, therefore, Kennan's memoirs demonstrate conclusively that, despite the elegance of his prose and the occasional brilliance of his analytical forays into the inner workings of both the American and Soviet political systems, he
is not a great political thinker, and, further, that he has been strikingly unsuccessful as a political practitioner. In Kennan's case, the one failure is indissolubly linked to the other. Lacking a reliable philosophical regulator, Kennan's impressive powers of illumination can be likened to an erratic searchlight that penetrates the darkness, momentarily revealing some hitherto unregarded aspect of the landscape, only to swing wildly and indiscriminately in some other (and frequently the very opposite) direction.

The reader is invited to weigh this thesis against the evidence presented below.

I

Volume I begins with a personal glimpse of Kennan's childhood in Milwaukee at the end of an era—i.e., the age of European ascendancy—which two world wars, one just around the corner, would obliterate within the lifetime of those, like Kennan, who were born around the turn of the century. English and Scottish ancestry, pioneer-farmer stock, "neither rich nor poor," Kennan's kind were people who "accepted the logic of their passion for independence" and who "asked of government only that it leave them alone to struggle in their own way." (I, 6) These family traits predisposed the young Kennan to reject the "classic assumptions of Marxism," as did the fact that "in pioneering families such as ours the eighteenth century lasted a half-century longer than its name suggests—down to the 1860s—just as it did in the American South and in Russia." As a consequence, it was not the culture of pre-revolutionary France that lingered on in these families, nor that of England embarking on the Industrial Revolution. Instead, "It was the Puritan culture of Scotland and the northeast of England." (I, 7)

Forewarned is forearmed! The fire of moral righteousness veritably leaps from the pages of these memoirs. For Kennan there is no Machiavellian separation of religious and secular realms, of public and private morality: there is only morality and immorality. The practical application may be more complicated in public than in private life, but the standards themselves are simple and, like peace, indivisible.

The other major family influence on George Kennan was—George Kennan. The elder Kennan (actually a cousin of the second George Kennan's grandfather) was a nineteenth-century Russophile scholar whose life and career bears a striking
resemblance to that of his latterday namesake. Mere coincidence? Probably not-Kennan confesses to the belief "that I was in some strange way destined to carry forward as best I could the elder Kennan's work. (I, 9)

Following a proper secondary education at St. John's Military Academy, Kennan studied at Princeton. Two of the books that made the deepest impression on him were F. Scott Fitzgerald's *This Side of Paradise* (read as a high school senior) and *The Great Gatsby*, the epilogue of which portrays the midwesterner's reaction to the "fashionable East"; Kennan recalls that "when I first read it, while still in college, I went away and wept unmanly tears."

Given his personal background, his secret desire to emulate a famous ancestor with whom he felt a curious and almost mystical kinship, and the sort of ambition that could only be satisfied by a public career, Kennan's decision to enter the fledgling Foreign Service in 1926 was logical enough. Kerman spent the next five and a half years studying the Russian language, reading Russian history and observing the unfolding drama of Stalinization from as close up as it was possible for a U.S. Foreign Officer to be in the years preceding the exchange of diplomatic recognition in 1933. Two years of formal study in Berlin were sandwiched between stints in the Baltic states-independent republics in the interwar years which served as diplomatic listening posts in lieu of an American legation in Moscow.

The first of an unbroken chain of disillusionments for Kennan came at the end of 1933 when newly elected President Roosevelt decided to extend diplomatic recognition to Stalinist Russia. Kennan had written a cable analyzing the Soviet attitude toward treaty obligations insofar as these affected the rights of foreign nationals in the USSR. Specifically, he cited two passages in the German-Soviet Treaty of 1925 as examples of "language on which one ought not to rely, if one was concerned to assure the personal safety of one's nationals in Russia." (I, 52) The U.S.-Soviet agreement, much to Kennan's chagrin at the time (and about which he learned from the newspapers), contained precisely the "weak verbiage that had failed to be effective in protecting the interests of other countries dealing with the Soviet Union." (I, 53) This episode, he argues, exemplifies "one of the most consistent and incurable traits of American statesmanship-namely its neurotic self-consciousness and introversion, the tendency to make statements and take actions with regard not to their effect on the international scene to which they are osten-
sibly addressed but rather to their effect on those echelons of American opinion, congressional opinion first and foremost, to which the respective statesmen are anxious to appeal." (I, 53)

According to Kennan, those twentieth century American statesmen who have fallen prey to this democratic temptation include John Hay (the Open Door incident); Franklin Delano Roosevelt ("on many occasions"); and John Foster Dulles ("liberation" rhetoric and the "massive retaliation" threat). The list, he asserts, could be continued indefinitely. (I, 54) Of course, every leader must make compromises, but considerations of domestic expediency have "often placed on American statesmanship the stamp of a certain histrionic futility, causing it to be ineffective in the pursuit of real objectives in the national interest, allowing it to degenerate into a mere striking of attitudes before the mirror of domestic political opinion." (I, 54)

Kennan's dissent over U.S. policy toward Moscow in 1933 was spurred by the conviction that American policy-makers were naive about Soviet Communism, that treaties meant nothing to Stalin, and, in particular, that the Soviet Foreign Ministry was totally subordinate to the secret policy "in all matters concerning the treatment of foreigners." (I, 55) Given this dim view of Soviet diplomacy, it is little wonder that Kennan was unenthusiastic about FDR's decision to recognize the Stalin regime in 1933 and that, in his words, "Never—neither then nor at any later date—did I consider the Soviet Union a fit ally or associate, actual or potential, for this country." (I, 57)

Prudent or not, the opening to the Soviet Union afforded Kennan his first opportunity for direct contact with Stalin's Russia. William C. Bullitt was appointed ambassador and among those posted in Moscow during this period were Loy Henderson and Charles (Chip) Bohlen. Kennan arrived on the scene in 1933 when the collectivization drive and forced industrialization were in full swing, but before the mass purges were launched. The embassy had barely opened for business when "the circumstances in which its work had to proceed were drastically altered by an event which marked one of the most fateful turning points in modern Russian history: the murder of Kirov, in Leningrad, on December 1." (I, 64) Kennan's first tour of duty in the USSR thus coincided with the most feverish stages of Stalinist terror. His views, far from sympathetic before he ever set foot on Soviet soil, were further hardened by the spectacle of the bloody purges and show trials which unfolded in the mid-30s. In the
Russia Stalin had wrought Kennan saw "cynicism, shamelessness, contempt for humanity—all triumphantly enthroned." How was he affected? In his words:

So insistently were the evidences of Russia's degradation borne in upon me during the years of my residence in Moscow—so prolonged and incessant were the hammer-blow impressions, each more outrageous and heartrending than the other—that the effect was never to leave me. Its imprint on my political judgment was one that would place me at odds with official thinking in Washington for at least a decade thereafter. (I, 70)

The crux of Kennan's quarrel with official U.S. policy toward the USSR was that he did not believe Stalin could be trusted as a partner in any common effort to restrain Hitler's Germany. He was a "hardliner" at a time when Washington was holding out an olive branch. In later years, he would, of course, take a very different view: the hardline he had once advocated (and then abandoned) would become the conventional wisdom and form the very core of America's response to the postwar Soviet challenge.

Kennan left Moscow in 1938, as the purges were finally winding down. He was assigned to the embassy in Prague. With a timing that can best be ascribed to Fate, Kennan arrived in the Czechoslovakian capital literally the morning after the Munich conference. At first, Kennan took a detached, Thucydidean view of the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia—an example of that remorseless, geopolitical determinism which co-exists uneasily in his thought with a strong Judeo-Christian belief in free will and moral responsibility. (I, 95)

An eyewitness to the Nazi takeover of Prague, he engaged himself in political reporting from the scene of the crime after the U.S. Embassy was officially closed and, in so doing, admirably captured the tragic predicament of a doomed, once-free nation.

When the war broke out in 1939, Kennan was transferred from Prague to Berlin. When Ambassador Kirk left Germany in October 1940 he turned his most valuable intelligence asset—Count Helmuth von Moltke who served as a civilian legal aide to the German general staff—over to Kennan. Kennan remembers von Moltke as being "everything that by the logic of his official environment he might have been expected not to be: a man of profound religious faith and outstanding moral courage, an idealist . . . immersed in a study of the Federalist Papers . . . [looking] for ideas as to how Germany might be led out of its existing corruption . . . " Indeed, he con-
siders von Moltke, a German aristocrat with a high post in Hitler's government, to have been "the greatest person, morally, and the largest and most enlightened in his concepts, that I met on either side of the battle lines in the Second World War." (I, 121) Kennan identifies strongly with "this lonely, struggling man" and confesses that von Moltke "has remained for me over the intervening years a pillar of moral conscience and an unfailing source of political and intellectual inspiration." (I, 122)

The impact of Kennan's wartime experiences in Nazi Germany on his worldview went well beyond what he learned from personal relationships. The study of German occupational policies "became something of a hobby" (I, 127) and led him to the conclusion "that even in the event of a complete military victory the Nazis would still face an essentially insoluble problem in the political organization and control of the other peoples of the continent." (I, 128) This insight, he notes, "had a marked effect later on my assessment of the prospects for political success of the Soviet leadership in its effort to play the part of imperial power, dominating and guiding the behavior of other states, particularly in East Europe." (I, 129) To wit:

... more and more .. I was brought to recognize the continued and undiminished relevance in the modern world of Gibbon's assertion that `there is nothing more contrary to nature than the attempt to hold in obedience distant provinces.' Out of this grew my feeling that one must not be too frightened of those who aspire to world domination. (I, 129-30)

Exposure to the harsh realities of Nazi rule did not erase the memories of Stalin's Russia during the purges. Even after the German attack in June, 1941, Kennan held firm to his belief that the USSR was not a suitable ally of the Western democracies. "Such a view," he wrote, "would not preclude the extension of material aid whenever called for by our own self interest. It would, however, preclude anything which might identify us politically or ideologically with the Russian war effort." (I, 133) This opinion "was to hold me in opposition to our governmental policy for some five years to come . . . until the movement . . . of official thinking from left to right would bring it close to my own outlook in the years 1946 to 1948, only to carry it away once more in the other direction . . . after 1949." (I, 134)

Following Pearl Harbor, when Hitler responded to Washington's
declaration of war on Japan by declaring war on the United States, Kennan spent nearly half a year as a Nazi prisoner-of-war. He was released by the Germans in the spring of 1942 and, after disillusioning tours of duty in Lisbon and London, returned to Moscow, now a wartime ally, in the summer of 1944. By this time, the tide of war on the Western front had turned decisively in favor of the Allies, and Stalin was already laying the groundwork for the postwar extension of Soviet power into Eastern Europe.

Kennan's impressions of the Soviet Union at the beginning of his second tour of duty in Moscow did not change his dim view of the prospects for U.S.-Soviet relations. He records one conversation with a Soviet acquaintance who, despite being a devout Stalinist, was also a keen observer of Russian behavior:

"We are being very successful these days," he said. "The more successful we are, the less we care about foreign opinion. This is something you should bear in mind about the Russian. The better things go for him, the more arrogant he is. That applies to all of us, in the government and out of it. It is only when we are having hard sledding that we are meek and mild and conciliatory. When we are successful, keep out of our way." (I, 197)

Kennan's revulsion against Stalinism was reinforced by revelations of the mass execution of nearly 10,000 Polish officers in the Katyn forest. The atrocity was brought to light in 1943 by the Germans who, presumably having stumbled on the graves, launched the expose as a wartime propaganda ploy to discredit their Soviet adversary. Kennan does not question the German version of the Katyn massacre. In his words, "the cream in some measure of the Polish intelligentsia . . . were individually executed . . . in the spring of 1940, by Soviet police detachments detailed for this purpose, the executions being carried out at the edges of mass graves into which, after receiving their shot in the neck, the bodies were pushed." (I, 200)

But this infamy was only one of a series of cynical and brutal Soviet assaults on Poland after 1939. Could the U.S. have done anything to save the Poles? Kennan thinks so. The tragedy of the Warsaw uprising-when the Red Army paused on the other side of the Vistula just long enough to permit the Germans to slaughter the heroic leaders of the rebellion-"more than anything else that had occurred to that point, brought the Western governments face to face with what they were up against in Stalin's Polish policy." This
was the moment, in Kennan's view, "when, if ever, there should have been a full-fledged and realistic political showdown with the Soviet leaders." (I, 211)

Kennan considers FDR's approach to the Polish question to have been utterly devoid of virtue—in either the Machiavellian or conventional sense of the word. The Soviets, in the end, were allowed to have their way with Poland, and the United States, having failed to confront them—indeed, having instead consorted with them by agreeing to Stalin's terms in exchange for little more than a figleaf—would be deeply implicated. Kennan remembers:

I was sorry to find myself, for the moment, a part of this. And I wished that instead of mumbling words of official optimism we had had the judgment and good taste to bow our heads in silence before the tragedy of a people who have been our allies, whom we have helped to save from our enemies, and whom we cannot save from our friends. (I, 210)

The Stalinist purges, the Holocaust, World War II—three catastrophes telescoped into little more than a decade—interwoven in a single tapestry of terror, tumult and travail. And Kennan was there to bear witness to all of it. It would be surprising if these events had not stirred one so civilized and cerebral. Surprising, too, if these same events had not set him to thinking about international affairs at the higher altitudes of moral and philosophical abstraction. Had he not, after all, witnessed politics at some of the lowest depths ever plumbed by history's bloodiest tyrants?

Despite his highmindedness, Kennan placed little stock in the United Nations. In 1944, he wrote that "International political life is something organic, not something mechanical. Its essence is change; the only international systems . . . which can be effective over long periods of time are ones... sufficiently pliable . . . to adjust to constant change . . . ." (I, 218) He warned against ignoring politics "in our absorption with ... a legalistic system for the preservation of the status quo," lest the system be "broken to pieces under the realities of international life." Kennan concluded this brief theoretical essay on a strident note: "We are being almost criminally negligent . . . with the sheer power relationships of the European peoples." (I, 219)

It was in this same period that he set forth, in his words, "the essence of what I knew about Russia generally, and Stalin in particular (I, 225), in the form of a thirty-five page essay entitled "Russia-Seven Years Later." Forty years later, it is still worthwhile
reading. Kennan correctly predicted that the Soviets would recover very rapidly from the war; that Stalin would revert to his single-minded obsession with "military industrialization"; that an autarkic postwar Russia would take whatever the Western powers would give her in foreign trade and credit but would give up nothing she valued in return; and that "the men in the Kremlin" would pursue the same "program of territorial and political expansion from Finland and the Baltic states to the Dardanelles which had once commended itself so strongly to Tsarist diplomats and which underlay the German-Russian Non-Aggression Pact of 1939."

He also offered an insightful psychoanalysis of Stalin. Stalin, he observed, had three salient traits that defined his character as a leader-his Georgian birthright which accounted for his courage, patience, guile and remorseless realism, his ignorance of the Western world, and his seclusion. The latter, in Kennan's view, was the most troublesome:

As long as the situation endures, the great nations of the West will unavoidably be in a precarious position in their relations with Russia. They will never be able to be sure when, unbeknownst to them, people of whom they have no knowledge, acting on motives utterly obscure, will go to Stalin with misleading information and with arguments to be used to their disadvantage-information which they cannot correct and arguments which they have no opportunity to rebut .... (I, 527-28)

Kennan handed his masterful analysis to Ambassador Averell Harriman who received it without apparent enthusiasm. It was only much later that Kennan was to learn, quite by accident, that the paper had in fact been dispatched to the State Department, although it remains unclear whether anyone there ever read it! In the concluding paragraph of this ill-fated paper, he struck a chord that was "personally most prophetic":

There will be much talk about the necessity for "understanding Russia"; but there will be no place for the American who is really willing to undertake this task . . . . He who would . . . will not find his satisfaction in the achievement of anything practical for his people, still less in any official or public appreciation of his efforts. The best he can look forward to is the lonely pleasure of one who stands at long last on a chilly and inhospitable mountaintop where few have been before, where few can follow, and where few will consent to believe he has been. (I, 230)
In the spring of 1945, as the dust settled on the battlefields of Europe, Kennan reflected on the new balance of power on the Continent and, specifically, Soviet Russia's place in it. The result was another searching analysis; in contrast to the aforementioned paper, this one focused on Moscow's external relations. In particular, Kennan asked whether the Soviet Union would have the capacity, energy and dynamism to manage a far-flung satellite empire. His answer was a tentative "no" provided the Western powers could find the resolve to "stand firm" and "take in their stride the worst efforts the disciplined and unscrupulous minorities pledged to the service of the political interests of the Soviet Union because Moscow would then have played its last real card . . . ." (I, 250)

Kennan thought there were two general reasons why the Soviet Union would probably not be 'successful imperialists-one common to all attempts at empire, one unique to the Soviet attempt. First, as Gibbon pointed out, all empires suffer from "the inevitable drawbacks of foreign rule." Subjugated peoples are not quick to shed their nationalistic sentiments and, in fact, are more likely to be aroused to new heights of chauvinistic fervor by the very fact of foreign domination. Second, Soviet Marxism, as a political-emotional force, was on the wane even in Stalin's Russia:

What remains is capable of inspiring patriotism and nationalistic sentiment, both for defense and for imperialist aggrandizement. But it is incapable of commanding that ultimate fund of human idealism on which the revolution, like the churches of all ages, was once able to draw. The deepest confidence, the most intimate hopes, the finest ideals: these are no longer the Kremlin's to command. It has before its gates a submissive but no longer an inspired mass of followers. (I, 249)

The basic outlines of the "X-Article" were present in this paper written two years earlier-i.e., long before the hardline interpretation of Soviet policy had come into vogue in Washington. This second Kennan essay on postwar Stalinist Russia suffered the same fate as the first: Ambassador Harriman returned it to its increasingly crestfallen author without comment.

Disheartened but undaunted, Kennan soon set about writing yet another long paper. His focus: Soviet motives, intentions and behavior. This time, however, the arrow struck its target dead center. The "Long Telegram" as it came to be known, catapulted Kennan into the political limelight. "My name was now known in Washington. I became qualified, in people's minds, as a candidate
for a different order of position than the ones I had previously oc-
cupied. (I, 298)

What had he written that created such a sensation within the
languid bureaucracy of Foggy Bottom accustomed as it was (and is)
to the soporific prose that pours in from hundreds of diplomatic
posts every day? Kennan’s composition had five main parts: (i) the
postwar Soviet outlook as expressed in official propaganda; (ii) the
background of the outlook; (iii) the reflection of the Soviet outlook
in practical policy on the official level; (iv) what to expect by way of
Soviet policy on the "unofficial, or subterranean plane"; and (v) the
implications of the Soviet challenge for postwar U.S. policy.

The first section was a straightforward recapitulation of Soviet
dogma based on the jaded formulations of Marx and Lenin. In the
second section Kennan demonstrated a striking insight into why
Marxism first found a territorial home, of all places, in Russia:

It was no coincidence . . . Only in this land ... could a doctrine
thrive which viewed economic conflicts of society as insoluble by
peaceful means. After establishment of the Bolshevik regime, Marxist
dogma, rendered even more truculent and intolerant by Lenin’s inter-
pretation, became a perfect vehicle for the sense of insecurity with
which Bolshevists ... were afflicted. In this dogma, with its basic
altruism of purpose, they found justification for their instinctive fear of
the outside world, for the dictatorship without which they did not
know how to rule, for cruelties they did not dare to inflict, for
sacrifices they felt bound to demand. In the name of Marxism they
sacrificed every single ethical value in their methods and tactics. To-
day they cannot dispense with it. It is a fig leaf of their moral and in-
tellectual respectability . . . This is why Soviet purposes must always
be solemnly clothed in the trappings of Marxism, and why no one
should underrate the importance of dogma in Soviet affairs ... [the
West is seen as] evil, hostile, and menacing, but destined ... to be
wracked with growing internal convulsions . . . . This thesis provides
justification for that increase of military and police power . . . that
isolation of Russian population from the outside world . . . and that
fluid and constant pressure to extend the limits of Russian police power
which are together the natural and instinctive urges of Russian rulers.
Basically this is .. a centuries-old movement in which conceptions of
offense and defense are inextricably confused . . . [b]ut in [its] new
guise of international Marxism ... it is more dangerous and insidious
than ever before. (I, 550-51)

In the following passage Kennan supplied a cogent answer to the
perennial question: Do the Soviets really believe what they say
about us? Are ritual genuflections at the altar of Marxism-Leninism ornaments or sacraments?

Many [Soviet leaders] are too ignorant of [the] outside world and mentally too dependent to question self-hypnotism, and have no difficulty making themselves believe what they find it comforting and convenient to believe . . . . In an atmosphere of Oriental secretiveness and conspiracy which pervades this government, possibilities for distorting or poisoning sources and currents of information are infinite. The very disrespect of Russians for objective truth . . . leads them to view all stated facts as instruments for furtherance of one ulterior purpose or another. There is good reason to suspect that this government is really a conspiracy within a conspiracy, and it is hard to believe that Stalin himself receives anything like an objective picture of outside world .... Inability of foreign governments to place their case squarely before Russian policy makers ... is a most disquieting feature of diplomacy in Moscow ... (I, 551)

The third section dealing with Soviet policy on the official level, was, like the first, rather pedestrian; by contrast, the fourth part, treating the issue of Soviet "unofficial, or subterranean" (i.e., subversive) policy was a blockbuster. This section laid out-in terms that could hardly have been better calculated to alarm policymakers-the lurid details of a worldwide network of clandestine organs and cover operations directed from the Kremlin. Here Kennan spoke of such ominous things as "an underground operating directorate of world communism, a concealed Comintern tightly coordinated and directed by Moscow" using "front organizations" and a "far-flung apparatus"; he predicted "particularly violent efforts . . . to weaken . . . influence of Western powers over colonial . . . peoples" and warned that "no holds will be barred." Communists," he said, "will . . . work toward destruction of all forms of personal independence." Their strategy will be designed "to set the major Western powers against each other." Simultaneously, "Soviet-dominated puppet political machines will be undergoing preparation to take over domestic power in . . . colonial areas." Finally, "all Soviet efforts on an unofficial international plane will be negative and destructive in character ...." Lest there be any doubt after this stark portrayal, Kennan concluded with the rather gratuitous observation that, "The Soviet regime is a police regime par excellence, reared in the dim half-world of Tsarist police intrigue ...." (I, 555-57)
Having thus sounded the alarm, he asserted that, notwithstanding, "the problem is within our power to solve . . . without recourse to any general military conflict." His reasons were a presentiment of the "X-Article": (a) the Soviets understand "the logic of power" and can "easily withdraw . . . when strong resistance is encountered at any point"; (b) "they are still by far the weaker force"; (c) the success of the Soviet system "is not yet finally proven" and may not survive the "supreme test of successive transfer of power from one individual or group to another"; and, finally, all Soviet propaganda is "basically negative and destructive" and therefore should be easily combated by "any intelligent and really constructive program." (I, 557-58)

To defeat the Soviet adversary the West would have to grasp the nature of the world communist movement. Not only governments but also the public would have to be educated: "I cannot overemphasize the importance of this point," he admonished. In the final analysis, the "health and vigor of our own society" is the best defense against subversion and revolution. Indeed, "Every courageous and incisive measure to solve internal problems of our own society . . . is a diplomatic victory over Moscow worth a thousand . . . joint communiques." But to take advantage of this insight, we would have to put forward "a much more positive and constructive picture of the sort of world we would like to see than we have put forward in the past." In the process, "we must . . . cling to our own methods and conceptions of human society . . . because the greatest danger that can befall us in coping with this problem of Soviet communism is that we shall allow ourselves to become like those with whom we are coping." (I, 558-59)

The Long Telegram may have been a trenchant piece of analysis, but it was not the first of its kind produced by Kennan. Why did this one strike a responsive chord where the others had not? The answers appear to lie less in the intrinsic merits of the paper than in its timing. The mood in Washington was changing by early 1946 from the initial near-euphoria following the allied victory over one form of totalitarianism to the dawning awareness that the West, war-weary and eager to demobilize, was now confronted with another, perhaps no-less-menacing form. The Long Telegram crystallized the inchoate misgivings and galvanized the still unarticulated resolve of the nation's leaders in the face of this new threat.

Kennan's tour de force made him an overnight celebrity in the government. He was brought back to Washington to become the
resident guru in Russian/Soviet affairs. Kennan was at first given a prestigious position at the new National War College—a suitable interim assignment while his dazzled State Department superiors were deciding how best to use his talents in a more direct, policy-making capacity. The interlude gave Kennan a welcome opportunity for contemplation. He notes that it was during this period "that some of the ideas were conceived that have been basic to my views on American policy ever since." (I, 309)

In early 1947 Kennan was informed that a policy planning unit would soon be formed within the State Department and that he would probably be asked to head it. Before the directive to set it up could be implemented, however, the Truman administration found itself in the midst of a major crisis occasioned by the British decision to withdraw from Greece. Invited to sit on the ad hoc committee constituted to study and recommend action, Kerman now found himself at the center of the decisionmaking process—after more than two decades on the periphery. Conjuring up images of "floodwaters" and "waves of Communist authority," Kennan strongly supported political and economic aid to Greece and even went so far as to suggest that the fall of Greece to Soviet-aided insurgents would have a ripple effect that might spread instability from the Balkans to the Middle East, then to Western Europe, and, ultimately, to the United States. (I, 318-19) Despite this ominous scenario, he adamantly opposed giving military aid to Turkey which he regarded as a very different kind of problem than that posed by Greece—i.e., Turkish difficulties were essentially domestic and therefore not dependent for their solution on U.S. intervention. In addition, he objected strenuously to the "sweeping language" used by the President in his emergency-aid request to Congress—the language, that is, that was soon to be canonized as the Truman Doctrine. (I, 320)

It was no accident that the formation of the Policy Planning Staff in the spring of 1947 coincided with the evolution of the Marshall Plan. Kennan, not without some justification, considers his role in this historic decision to have been crucial. He argued forcefully that the U.S. faced the choice of underwriting Europe's economic recovery or watching the "shadows which already enveloped the east" fall across the west as well. (I, 330) Kennan lists the main recommendations of his planning group as follows:

(1) the Europeans should be expected to take the initiative in drawing up a recovery program and implementing it;
(2) the offer should be open to all of Europe, including the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe;

(3) "decisive emphasis" should be placed on the economic reconstruction of Germany and on the concept of German recovery as a vital component of Europe as a whole". (I, 343)

This last point, especially, bears the mark of Kennan's influence. His admiration for German cultural and economic achievements dated back to his school days when he lived and studied there for a time; even the rigors of wartime confinement did not vitiate these warm sentiments. As early as the summer of 1945, nearly two years before the Marshall Plan was formulated, Kennan wrote: "We have no choice but to lead our section of Germany . . . to a form of independence so prosperous, so secure, so superior, that the East cannot threaten it." (I, 258) This view was conspicuously out of step with the punitive attitude reflected in Allied policies and practices immediately after the German surrender. But by 1947 the climate of opinion had shifted dramatically; what was once an eccentric plea could now be presented as a categorical imperative. "In my opinion," Kennan told his class at the War College, "it is imperatively urgent that the improvement of economic conditions and the revival of productive capacity in the west of Germany be made the primary object of our policy in that area and be given top priority in all our occupation policies; and that this principle be adopted as a general line of procedure of this government, binding on all of its departments and agencies." (I, 334)

Meanwhile, on the other side of the world, Kennan claims to have been instrumental in moving the U.S. government toward liberalization of General McArthur's strict occupational policies in Japan during late 1948 and 1949. Recalling this episode, Kennan writes, "I consider my part in bringing about this change to have been, after the Marshall Plan, the most significant constructive contribution I was ever able to make in government." He notes that his personal contribution in the drafting of the far-reaching recommendations that, in effect, gave Japan's government back to the Japanese has gone unnoticed but asserts that "on no other occasion did my recommendations meet with such wide, indeed almost complete, acceptance in Washington." (I, 393)

Kennan's success in shaping U.S. policy toward Japan was, by his own reckoning, incomplete. On the most important issue of a permanent U.S. military presence in Japan he lost. He opposed such a
presence, favoring instead an attempt to use this issue as a bargaining chip in negotiations with the Russians. The fact that Washington made a decision unilaterally, thereby foreclosing negotiations, "probably had an important bearing on the Soviet decision to unleash the attack in Korea," he argues. "I have seen no evidence that the possibility of a connection between our decision to proceed independently to the conclusion of a separate Japanese peace settlement, involving the indefinite retention of an American military presence in Japan in the post-treaty period, on the one hand, and the Soviet decision to unleash a civil war in Korea, on the other, ever entered the mind of anyone in Washington except myself." (I, 395)

Celebrity status and the special sense of personal satisfaction derived from playing a role in history-making events followed twenty years of obscurity and frustration for Kennan, but the Korean War symbolized both the ephemeral nature of his influence and the distortion of what he now says were his original intents. Of course, the militarization of U.S. foreign policy, which he so roundly deplored, preceded Korea. According to Kennan, it was the creation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 1949 that first twisted the logic of the Marshall Plan into a false imperative to re-mobilize for war.

At its inception, containment was a political strategy that rested far more on American generosity and enlightened diplomacy than on some crude plan to build a garrisoned fence around the USSR. Unfortunately (for Kennan), a postwar "Maginot Line" mentality is indissolubly linked with the "X-Article" in American political lore. Ironically, this article—one of the most celebrated political essays ever written by an American official—would not have been published if Kennan had known he was about to be named to a high post in the State Department. By the same token, he would not have been placed in the paradoxical and morally ambiguous position of being officially associated with a policy he adamantly opposed even though that policy appeared to rest on a set of assumptions and premises he had not only endorsed but—more than anyone else in the government—also had elucidated.

Kennan believes that "perhaps the most serious deficiency" of the "X-Article" was "the failure to make clear that what I was talking about when I mentioned the containment of Soviet power was not the containment by military means of a military threat, but the political containment of a political threat." (I, 358) Whether he merely "mentioned" containment or actually propagated the idea is
open to debate; what is certain, however, is that "containment" of Soviet Communism became the rallying cry for the enthusiasts of the new military alliance—the first peacetime arrangement of its kind for the U.S. in 150 years.

Kennan was out of the country when the NATO decision was taken, but his opposition to the treaty was certainly no secret. He held firmly to the view, expressed in analytical papers written long before his elevation as chief policy planner, that the USSR's military capabilities far exceeded its political and administrative capacity to manage a far-flung multinational empire. (See, for example, Appendix B, "Russia's International Position at the Close of the War with Germany," written in May 1945, I, 540-41). For this reason, among others, he was convinced that the Soviets had no intention of attacking Western Europe: they would have their hands full just trying to hold onto their position in Eastern Europe. This view was one of the keys to Kennan's early optimism about the long-term outcome of the emerging Cold War. In addition, Kennan "had little confidence in the value of written treaties of alliance generally." (I, 408)

His discordant views on NATO fell on deaf ears. He was now sent into that peculiar kind of internal exile official Washington reserves for former insiders who have fallen from grace. His disillusionment speaks for itself:

The greatest mystery of my own role in Washington in those years, as I see it today, was why so much attention was paid in certain instances, as in the case of the telegram of February 1946 from Moscow and the X-Article, to what I had to say, and so little in others. (I, 403-04)

NATO and the German question were really two sides of the same coin. Kennan considered a "correct handling" of Germany "to be vital to the success of any policy toward Russia" but he "suffered from the realization of my own total isolation from every form of decision-making that related to German matters." (I, 416) He believed that partition was unnatural, especially in an age of nationalism and especially in a territory inhabited by the nationally self-conscious German people. To divide this vibrant national community permanently "would only be to re-create the aspirations and compulsions of the mid-nineteenth century, and to place a premium on the emergence of a new Bismark and a new 1870." (I, 416) The problem, he reasoned, could not be solved "by thrusting Germany
farther into the past"; instead, it was necessary "to thrust both Ger-
many and Europe farther into the future" by creating "a united fed-
eral Europe into which the united Germany could be imbedded." Hitler had obligingly (and for all the wrong reasons) paved the way when he established "central authorities in a whole series of areas: in transportation, in banking, in procurement and distribution of raw materials and in the control of various forms of nationalized property. " (I, 417)

Early on, after his return from Germany in 1942, Kennan had at-
ttempted to interest his State Department superiors in the possibility of using this infrastructure to rebuild Europe into something sturdy enough to enable Europeans to face the future boldly, but his efforts were fruitless. Six years later he was Foggy Bottom's chief policy planner and, as such, at least in a formal sense, well-positioned to make his visionary ideas on Germany and Europe known.

By this time Soviet intransigence was an established fact. It was becoming increasingly apparent that the Western allies would have to make separate arrangements for a German government in their sectors-and the sooner the better. The U.S., Great Britain and France took the first important step in this direction at a series of exploratory meetings in London in February and March, 1948. Ken-
nan claims that there was a direct relationship between these talks and the Berlin blockade. The concept of a West German govern-
ment "aroused keen alarm among Soviet leaders." (I, 419)

The so-called London Program was announced in June: among other things, it envisioned the early creation of a separate currency for western Germany. The currency question precipitated the blockade, but Kennan argues that this Soviet _demarche_ was really part of a broader strategy-"a species of squeeze play." Stalin was giving the Western powers a choice: either abandon Berlin or negotiate a comprehensive agreement. The former would have handed Moscow a major diplomatic victory and demoralized West Germany; the latter, however, required preparation of a new negotiating position-and that, in turn, meant re-thinking the whole conceptual framework of present policy.

Kennan's policy-planning group was charged with studying the problem in July 1948 and, the following November, urged that an all-German government be created in conjunction with the phased withdrawal of foreign troops from the bulk of German territory under a system of four-power safeguards and guarantees. The U.S. would have had to obtain the concurrence of Great Britain and
France and even the Soviets would probably have rejected the proposal. But the U.S. would have seized the high ground-in itself a worthy diplomatic objective, Kennan thought.

Circumstances conspired against Kennan’s plan. The Berlin airlift occupied the attention and galvanized the unity of Western leaders like no other event in the early postwar period. Beating the blockade, drawing up a West German constitution, drafting a new three-power Allied occupation statute-these efforts absorbed virtually all the diplomatic energies of the Western powers. Kennan’s description of how the bureaucratic steamroller crushed the fragile blossom of an idea whose time would never come provides a textbook example of how means can become ends-and policy its own purpose:

As the process went forward, it gained steadily in momentum and in the aura of legitimacy. People’s *amour propre* as well as their enthusiasms became engaged. There was growing personal commitment to what was being accomplished. Increasingly . . . the undertaking assumed in many minds an irrevocable character . . . . What was supposed to have been the servant of policy became its determinant instead. (I, 428)

Kennan, of course, was powerless to slow the momentum of this plan, which he considered to be tragically short-sighted. Once again, politics triumphed over policy. Once again, Kennan’s views were scorned. Once again, he watched helplessly as men of meager intellect and myopic vision frittered away once-in-a-lifetime opportunities for creative leadership. Indeed, the London Program "provided no basis at all for negotiations with the Russians, and meant in effect the abandonment of hope for any early removal of the division of Germany and the continent." (I, 428) Moreover, this program was "the child of our occupational establishment in Germany" and it envisioned the perpetuation of its own authority indefinitely. This was an establishment for which Kennan confessed to have had "an almost neurotic distaste," due in part to the generally atrocious behavior of Americans on overseas assignment and in part to the character of democratic societies which, he believes, are ill-equipped politically or psychologically to sustain enterprises so antithetical to their own nature.

Kennan believed that the future of Germany foreshadowed and shaped the future of Europe: it would not, he thought, be possible to divide one without dividing the other. But if Europe was facing a
divided future, on what terms would the western "half" face the eastern one? Clearly, dividing the Continent in this way made uniting "our" side an urgent priority. How this amalgamation might best be accomplished was the last major policy issue Kennan addressed in his official capacity as government's top star-gazer. The recommendation he eventually made envisaged not one but two distinct western groupings: the United States, Canada and Great Britain forming a triangular Atlantic association and the countries of the Continent forming some sort of western European community within an elastic framework that held out the hope of eventual unification with eastern Europe. Kennan provides an impressive list of advantages that accompanied this idea:

(1) no rearmament of West Germany;
(2) "incomparably greater flexibility in any negotiations with the Russians over the question of disengagement and Germany unification";
(3) no need to press the British to enter the European Economic community; "on the contrary, the EEC without Britain would have fitted excellently into the objectives of American policy";
(4) no cause for antagonism with General de Gaulle either over his misgivings about British membership in the Common Market or "over his desire to get on with the organization under French leadership of a continental Europe in which the United States would not be a participating entity." The U.S. could even have applauded de Gaulle's efforts to bring about greater East-West collaboration on the Continent. (I, 456)

Kennan's proposals were rejected out of hand by France and greeted skeptically by the British. He must have felt particularly crushed by London's cold shoulder because his plan called for an intimate association between the U.S., Canada and Great Britain. "This," he confessed, "had been my strong preference ever since I had assumed the directorship of the staff." He also confessed to entertaining "visions of a world-trading, maritime bloc, to include not only the British, the Canadians, and ourselves but certain of the Commonwealth nations and possibly some entities of the Scandinavian and Iberian peninsulas as well, to be based on a single currency, to develop eventually into a federal unit with a common sovereignty, and to flank in this capacity a similar grouping on the continent." In the end, however, this episode turned out to be yet another "frustrating and discouraging experience." (I, 458)
The British financial crisis of 1949-and the clumsy U.S. response to it-confirmed in Kennan's mind the impossibility of finding any sympathy in Washington for close association-much less confederation-with the British. Kennan now felt almost totally isolated in the policy communities on both sides of the Atlantic. (I, 462) The West Europeans were happy to have the U.S. shoulder the burden of their defense indefinitely, while the Americans, "already committed to a militarized view of the cold war," were unwilling to weaken NATO "by toying with plans which failed to include Britain, Canada, and the United States." Besides, the denizens of the Pentagon "enjoyed their presence in Germany, as in Japan." (I, 463)

Whether the issue concerned the future of Japan, Germany or Europe as a whole, the question of principle was the same: "to hold the door open to permit the eventual emergence of large areas (a united, demilitarized Germany, a united Europe, a demilitarized Japan) that would be in the military sense uncommitted, as between the two worlds." He was "prepared to see us withdraw our military forces if Soviet power would be equivalently withdrawn." Finally, he "believed that a readiness on our side to withdraw would eventually stimulate a disposition on the Soviet side to do likewise." (I, 463)

Kennan's solicitude for the future of Europe was not altogether altruistic. He thought it was necessary "to get us as soon as possible out of the position of abnormal political-military responsibility in Western Europe which the war had forced upon us. "A status quo dependent upon the constancy of a broad American commitment "could not endure indefinitely." The U.S. was "not fitted, either institutionally or temperamentally, to be an imperial power in the grand manner." Eventually, "this divided Europe would . . . have to yield to something more natural." The purpose of U.S. policy, he argued, should be "to permit that 'something' to come into being when the time for it was ripe-not . . . to constitute an impediment to it." (I, 464)

Kennan attributed his policy isolation to two factors: first, he was charged with long-range planning while his chief protagonists were preoccupied with immediate problems; second, and more importantly, he "did not believe in the reality of a Soviet military threat to Western Europe." This soft view of Soviet intentions would become a Kennan trademark in the years following his retirement from the Foreign Service.

Kennan left the government in 1950 ostensibly because of dif-
ferences over procedure within the State Department. But, as he realized better than anyone else, "The heart of the difficulty lies in the fact that my concept of the manner in which our diplomatic effort should be conducted is not shared by any of the other senior officials in the department ..." Lacking a "firm theoretical groundwork," the government would be powerless to correct its course. Such correction "can come only through an intensive educational effort directed toward our public opinion in general and particularly toward the work of our universities. All this impels me to the thought that if I am ever to do any good in this work, having the courage of my convictions, it must be outside the walls of this institution the State Department and not inside them." (I, 468)

II

When Kennan left the State Department he took refuge in the cloistered surroundings of Princeton's Institute for Advanced Studies. He had not burned any bridges behind him; on the other hand, he was determined to continue the struggle against the errant Establishment. Standing Clausewitz on his head, official Washington now viewed international politics as a continuation of war by other means. The greatest danger, Kennan reasoned, was that this perverse idea would in time become fixed in the public mind. "Never before," he wrote, "has there been such utter confusion with respect to foreign policy. The President doesn't understand it; Congress doesn't understand it; nor does the public, nor does the press. (I, 500) George Kennan was now, more than ever, a man with a mission:

Only the diplomatic historian, working from the leisure and detachment of a later day, will be able to unravel this incredible tangle and to reveal the true aspect of the various factors and issues involved. And that is why, as it seems to me, no one in my position can contribute very much more ... unless he first turns historian, earns public confidence and respect through the study of an earlier day, and then gradually carries the public up to a clear and comprehensive view of the occurrences of these recent years. (I, 500)

The Korean War illustrated the hazards of a foreign policy based on the indiscriminate application of military force and lacking in the subtlety, finesse and sophistication of traditional diplomacy. The
disastrous train of events in Korea commenced in early October with the crossing of the 38th parallel by U.S. forces; having arrived at the Manchurian border, McArthur launched his "win the war" offensive on November 24; the Chinese promptly swarmed across the Yalu river, overwhelming McArthur's legions; the U.S. was then compelled, at enormous human and political cost, to undertake the most humiliating retreat in history.

Kennan was in a position to say "I told you so"—and was, in fact, pressed back into temporary duty which gave him the opportunity to do just that. It was an opportunity he did not waste. He was able to play a supporting role in the thankless but important task of helping the government avert total defeat and save face in some measure. His most direct contribution was to facilitate an eventual Soviet-American modus vivendi in Korea by engaging in informal discussions with Jacob Malik, the Soviet UN ambassador.

Korea proved "the terrible danger of letting national policy be determined by military considerations alone." That was the obvious lesson, but one no less important "is the great and sometimes crucial value-so seldom heeded, so difficult perhaps to heed, in American statesmanship-of wholly secret, informal adversaries, as adjuncts to the overt and formal processes of international diplomacy." (II, 38)

Always an avid student of European history, now for the first time spurred by the conflict in Korea, Kennan began reading Asian history. What he discovered confirmed his low opinion of U.S. policy in the Far East. The U.S., he concluded, had played a disruptive role in the Asian balance of power ever since America's arrival on the scene in the nineteenth century. By forcing the door open in Korea in the late 1880s, we had unwittingly stimulated a struggle among the major regional powers for control of a territory and people which these powers had up until then tacitly agreed to let alone. With the decline and fall of Imperial China, this struggle became a contest between Russia and Japan. By exerting itself to get the Japanese out, the U.S. set the stage for Russians to come in. This ill-fated process was completed with the total obliteration of Japan's role in Northeast Asia by the Americans after the Second World War. (I, 48)

The U.S. had subsequently appropriated to itself the role of keeper of the regional balance there. "Could we, and should we," he asked, "remain there forever?" To attempt to do so would be folly, he thought. It was too late to re-introduce the Japanese. Neutraliza-
tion of Korea, politically and militarily, would have been the "ideal" solution, but the Korean Communists, now deeply entrenched in the North would most likely have rejected it. "Military neutralization"-i.e., removal of all outside troops-might be the lesser of the evils, under the circumstances. The catch was that the Russians would insist on the removal of U.S. bases from Japan as a *quid pro quo*. Kennan urged that we explore this possibility with Moscow, but Acheson demurred.

Once again, at the root of this disagreement was a fundamental difference of interpretation and approach to dealing with the Soviet Union. Kennan cites three reasons why he could not see eye to eye with Acheson on these matters. First, the Soviets looked on negotiations carried out in public as propaganda and therefore treated the resulting arrangements with contempt; they looked upon *private* negotiations aimed at "highly specific agreements" in a very different light, however. Second, he saw no evidence of Soviet eagerness to occupy any more territory, especially in the Far East. Here, "the distinction between the use of Soviet forces in an *international* conflict and of *puppet* forces in a *civil* conflict" was crucial. He did not doubt for a minute that Moscow would seize every opportunity to promote friendly governments in contiguous territories. "But this was precisely what was not involved in the specter of a sudden Soviet armed attack on Japan." Third, if Soviet troops returned to Korea after a mutual withdrawal, the U.S. could always respond in kind. (II, 50-52)

The hidden agenda in this argument, as Kennan freely admits, was to get U.S. bases and forces out of Japan. He believed they would always be a bone of contention in Japanese-American relations ("the communists will vigorously make capital of it") and that in the final analysis Japanese resistance to Soviet pressures would depend upon the "enlightened self-restraint" of the Japanese people, not the presence of American soldiers.

With respect to other issues affecting U.S. Far Eastern policy, Kennan was against the effort to obstruct Peking's admission to the UN but "never favored the conclusion of formal bilateral diplomatic relations between the U.S. and China." Nor was he infatuated with Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist regime on Formosa: "I have no use for either of the two regimes," he wrote. (II, 54) His characterization of Chinese diplomacy, although he claimed to harbor no prejudices toward them as a people, is extremely uncomplimentary. (II, 55-57) Finally, he argued that the U.S. had "no business trying to play a
role in the affairs of the mainland of Southeast Asia."

Kennan’s views on Asia in part no doubt reflected his Eurocentric conception of the world. In the two decades between his entry into the Foreign Service and his meteoric rise triggered by the Long Telegram, he had lived and worked in Europe, returning to the United States only for an occasional vacation or on official business. He identified with the Old World, the aristocratic Europe of monarchs and Metternichs. He had a romantic attachment to the golden Age of Diplomacy when war was the sport of kings, alliances changed like like the seasons, and common traditions united friend and foe alike in something called the comity of nations. This psychological immersion in the remnants of Western Civilization as they survived in Europe up until World War II, led to a kind of culture shock when he returned to the U.S. after the war.

In a chapter entitled "Re-encounter With America," Kennan reveals an alienation from his native society even more profound than his alienation from its political establishment. The notes he made as he traveled around the country are laced with caustic observations about the "blighted condition of American cities" where he saw "cold mute slabs of skyscrapers ... ugliness ... eroticism ... a grim waste of crisscrossing railroads, embankments, viaducts, junk lots, storage lots, piles of refuse, and the most abject specimens of human habitation." (II, 67) On a visit to Southern California in 1946, he was struck by "the fragile quality of all life in the great urban concentrations of the motor age." The decadence he saw in California society epitomized for him the worst of the modern age. He wondered: "Will it not operate to subvert our basic political tradition? And if so, what will happen to our whole urbanized, industrialized society, so vulnerable to regimentation and centralized control." (II, 81–83)

Kennan’s re-encounter with his motherland provoked philosophical reflections on American democracy too-and on the peculiar brand of diplomacy it fostered. As head of the Policy Planning Staff he was struck by "the chaos that prevailed in official Washington circles when it came to such things as concept and principle in the formulation of foreign policy." Long ago he had noticed "the contrast between the lucid and realistic thinking of early American statesmen of the Federalist period and the cloudy bombast of their successors of later decades." With more time for scholarly study, he was now surprised to discover "how much of our stock equipment, in the way of the rationale and rhetoric of foreign
policy, was what we had inherited from the statesmen of the period from the Civil War to World War II, and how much of this equipment was utopian in its expectations, legalistic in its concepts of methodology, moralistic in the demands it seemed to place on others, and self-righteous in the degree of high-mindedness and rectitude it imputed to ourselves." Such attributes were manifested in the blind faith so many Americans had placed in the League of Nations, the Kellog Pact, and the United Nations. All these "vain-glorious and pretentious assertions of purpose" were little more than "unconscious pretexts for the failure . . . to deal with the real substance of international affairs." (II, 70-71)

Kennan was invited to give a series of lectures on American foreign policy at the University of Chicago in April 1950 which resulted in the publication of American Diplomacy 1900-1950 the following autumn. This hastily written little volume was destined to be his best-selling book and was, in his words, "the real beginning of an academic career." (II, 77)

His diary notes from this period decry "the obvious deterioration in the quality both of American life and of the natural environment ... under the impact of headlong overpopulation, industrialization, commercialization and urbanization . . . ." He began to experience "the first reluctant and horrifying pangs of doubt as to whether America's problems were really soluble at all by operation of the liberal-democratic and free-enterprise institutions traditional to our country." (II, 85) Might it be necessary to copy the totalitarian model of our adversaries in order to overcome the "evils of the modern age"? Kennan could not accept this conclusion:

But if one did not accept it, one had then to find something else: some middle ground between the permissive excesses of American democracy and the timidities, the hypocrisies and the cruelties of Soviet communism. The problem was to find a method of governing people that would not demean or deceive them, would permit them to express freely their feelings and opinions, and would take decent account of the feelings and opinions thus expressed, and yet would assure a sufficient concentration of governmental authority, sufficient stability in its exercise, and sufficient selectivity in the recruitment of those privileged to exert it, to permit the formulation and implementation of hopeful long-term programs of social and environmental change. (II, 87)

It was also during this period that Kennan was approached about running for Congress and nearly did so. He decided against it when
Princeton informed him that he would have to give up his sinecure as a fellow at the Institute for Advanced Study if he ran for public office. He would have run as a Democrat, although he was indifferent as to party affiliation. He felt a close kinship with neither liberals nor conservatives, and confessed to a "growing intellectual loneliness" insofar as domestic policy was concerned. Even his attempt at foreign-policy analysis "seemed increasingly, with the years, an empty exercise; for what use was there, I had to ask, in attempting to protect in its relations to others a society that was clearly failing in its relation to itself?" (II, 88)

In the fall of 1951, Secretary of State Acheson asked him to go back to Moscow as U.S. ambassador. Kennan accepted, thus embarking upon the biggest debacle in his diplomatic career. Under the best of circumstances, ambassadors, by the very nature of modern diplomacy, are often glorified "go-fers" for their governments. As a lame-duck appointee, Kennan was little more than a caretaker. But even that modest role was not without its hazards in Moscow in the last intrigue-laden days of the old dictator's rule. For reasons that he can only speculate about, Kennan apparently incurred Stalin's wrath—although the possibility that he was merely a scapegoat for the government he represented cannot be dismissed. At any rate, Stalin declared Kennan persona non grata in September. The job for which his whole career had been one continuous preparation thus lasted only six months. His flight from Moscow landed in Berlin, that citadel of freedom and symbol of the Cold War. Kennan was asked about the life of an ambassador in Stalin's Russia; he answered by comparing conditions there with his experiences as an internee in Nazi Germany! This undiplomatic response occasioned a firestorm of diplomatic protest from the USSR, and finally gave Washington and Moscow something they could agree upon—neither wanted to have anything more to do with George Kennan. (II, 159)

If the outgoing Administration that had "discovered" Kennan now wanted to keep him at arm's length, the incoming Republicans could hardly be expected to embrace him more warmly. Just days before president-elect Eisenhower took office, Kennan gave a speech which "to his surprise and consternation" was billed on the front pages of Washington's two major newspapers at that time as a direct challenge to the foreign policy views of soon-to-be Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles. From that point on, he was shunned by the Washington policy community and treated contemptuously by Dulles himself.
This was a most ignominious end to a distinguished career. He was actually forced out of the Foreign Service under a special legal provision stipulating that ambassadors not appointed to a new diplomatic post within three months after leaving their old one would be automatically retired. "It was not easy to recognize in oneself the first person to be retired under a legislative provision designed to permit the government to divest itself of incompetent ambassadors," he wrote. (II, 179)

Kennen's disenchantment with the U.S. government was solidified by the excesses of McCarthyism in the early 1950s. That a demagogue in the legislative branch might institute a witchhunt for his own odious reasons did not surprise Kerman—as a career diplomat, his disdain of Congress, especially in matters of foreign policy, knew no bounds. But he expected higher standards of professional integrity and public morality from the State Department. In this expectation, too, he was to be bitterly disappointed.

Kennen devotes an entire chapter to McCarthyism in the second volume of his memoirs. He details his futile efforts to help old friends and trusted cohorts—men like John Service, Edmund Clubb, and Robert Oppenheimer. In the process, he managed to get himself on the McCarthy hit list. He survived the inquisition unscathed, no thanks to anyone in the State Department. Suddenly he realized that "twenty-five years of faithful and honorable service meant nothing whatsoever. And not one of one's superiors in the executive branch of the government would lift a finger to help." (II, 210-11)

McCarthyism epitomized the mindless anti-Communism Kennan had been trying to combat since the start of the Cold War. What remained of his faith in the government was shaken by the shameful persecution of colleagues whom he was "so powerless to defend . . . from obloquy and injustice." (II, 214) His faith in America, what was left of it, was also shaken. McCarthyism reflected "a massive failure of public understanding" about world politics. Eastern Europe was not handed over to Stalin on a silver platter and China was not sold down the river by closet Communists in the State Department as too many Americans were wont to believe. Rather a combination of political-military realities and "serious but relatively innocent and understandable human errors" accounted for Communist advances since World War II. (II, 221)

The McCarthy hysteria also showed that American society was incapable of viewing domestic communism soberly. The crusading spirit "blinded people to the real nature of our national problems."
Americans were vastly overrating a single external problem (i.e., Communism) and underrating multiple internal problems. This "total externalization of evil" was particularly dangerous because it blocked the kind of introspection and self criticism upon which democratic societies thrive. (II. 222) In addition, McCarthyism signalled the triumph of "a rousing anti-intellectualism, a mistrust of thought, and a suspicion of education," all of which Kennan found abhorrent. "I could never recapture, after these experiences . . . quite the same faith in the American system of government and traditional American outlooks that I had had, despite all the discouragements of official life, before that time." (II. 228)

McCarthyism might have induced Kennan to forsake public affairs for good in favor of the serene life of a contributing scholar; instead, it apparently stiffened his resolve to continue the struggle against the dogmatism and demagoguery McCarthy and company represented. So long as the Manichean mentality that made McCarthyism possible persisted, U.S.-Soviet relations could be expected to remain frozen in the shapes and forms of the Cold War. This rigid worldview, Kennan believed, would render its adherents not only skeptical of all proposals for new global or regional systems, but incapable of imagining ones different from those presently in place. There was a certain Hegelian logic behind this worldview: reality, by definition, is rational. However bad things might seem to be, anything else would be worse. It is easy to see how this kind of reasoning could prove deadly to the processes of traditional diplomacy, which flourished in fluid situations where there was opportunity for creative statesmanship.

Kennan abhorred the utter lack of creativity, improvisation, conceptual clarity, and openness to new ideas that he attributed, rightly or wrongly, to America's postwar leadership. The only new idea that anyone in government had put forward since 1945 was "containment"; as its principal theoretician, Kennan was uniquely qualified to argue that the policy-makers had even managed to get that one all wrong! The creation of the Policy Planning Staff was a step in the right direction, but the decision-makers, fearing they had created a Frankenstein and lacking the moral/political courage to stand up to vested interests and carping politicians, soon reduced the planning function to a travesty.

That Kennan did not shake the habit of thinking about foreign-policy alternatives—or give up trying to influence policy-makers—after leaving the government is evidenced most clearly in
his controversial Reith Lectures, sponsored by the British Broadcasting Corporation in early 1957. In these radio talks he presented a bold new formula for ending—or at least alleviating—the superpower stalemate in Europe, inducing a long overdue thaw in the Cold War, controlling the nuclear arms race, and enhancing the long-term prospects for world peace.

The result was electrifying. The lectures created a sensation in England and were subsequently re-broadcast all over Canada and one of the major American networks. In addition, they were eventually published in a variety of foreign languages. Kennan suggests they were perhaps "the most . . . widely listened to series of political talks ever delivered anywhere." (II, 235) Joseph Alsop wrote in the Chicago Sun Times that "What Kennan had to say about the Soviet Union and its relations with the West attracted vastly more interest and stimulated vastly more controversy in Britain, France, and West Germany than anything either President Eisenhower or Secretary of State John Foster Dulles has said in recent memory." (II, 236)

Of the six lectures, the two in the middle—dealing with the German question and nuclear weapons, respectively—were the most explosive. Kennan saw these two issues as inextricably intertwined. He urged that the U.S. drop its insistence "that an all-German government should be free to join NATO, and declare ourselves instead the partisans of a neutralized and largely disarmed unified Germany." (II, 243) It was, he thought, "far more desirable to get the Soviet forces out of Central and Eastern Europe than to cultivate a new German army for the purpose of opposing them while they remain there." (II, 243)

In the next lecture, he emphasized both the dangers and illusory nature of the nuclear arms race. He did not oppose the retention of nuclear weapons as a deterrent but "opposed the basing of our defense posture upon them (which was exactly what was then being done). " (II, 244) In a presentiment of his later crusade against the nuclear arms race, Kennan poignantly questioned the wisdom of current strategic thinking:

Are we to flee like haunted creatures from one defensive device to another, each more costly and humiliating than the one before, breaking up our cities the next, attempting to surround ourselves with elaborate electronic shields on the third, concerned to prolong the length of our lives while sacrificing all the values for which it might be worth while to live at all? If I thought this was the best the future held
for us, I should be tempted to join those who say, "Let us stake our safety on God's grace and our own good consciences and on that measure of common sense and humanity which even our adversaries possess; but then let us at least walk like men, with our heads up, so long as we are permitted to walk at all." (II, 224)

This stance, of course, was a direct challenge to Dulles's doctrine of "massive retaliation." But what Kennan opposed even more vehemently was a reliance on tactical nuclear weapons for the defense of NATO. This public denunciation could not have been more timely: a NATO summit meeting was about to convene at which the question of whether to introduce nuclear weapons into Continental NATO arsenals would be decided. Kennan's message to the NATO leaders was simple and direct: fighting a nuclear war in Europe could bring no conceivable advantage to anyone. (II, 245)

A year later Kennan delivered another BBC lecture in which he denounced nuclear weapons on environmental grounds. To risk permanently damaging nature's handiwork was "simply wrong":

We are not the owners of the planet we inhabit; we are only its custodians. There are limitations on the extent to which we should be permitted to devastate or pollute it. Our own safety and convenience is not the ultimate of what is at stake in the judgment of these problems. People did not struggle and sacrifice and endure over the course of several thousand years to produce this civilization merely in order to make it possible for us, the contemporaries of 1959, to make an end to it or to place it in jeopardy at our pleasure for the sake of our personal safety. Our deepest obligation . . . relates not to ourselves alone but to the past and to the future." (II, 247)

The way out of this terrible dilemma was not to be found in some pie-in-the-sky proposal for eternal peace but rather in a strategic doctrine that took account of present realities on the Continent. "Under such a doctrine," he asserted, "armed forces would indeed be needed . . . but they . . . might better be paramilitary ones, of a territorial-militia type, somewhat on the Swiss example, rather than regular military units on the World War II pattern." Instead of leaving bad enough alone, Kennan elaborated:

Their function should be primarily internal rather than external. It is on the front of police realities, not on regular military battlefields, that the threat of Russian communism must primarily be met. The training of such forces ought to be such as to prepare them not only to offer
whatever overt resistance might be possible to a foreign invader but also to constitute the core of a civil resistance movement on any territory . . . overrun by the enemy .... For this reason they need not, and should not, be burdened with heavy equipment or elaborate supply requirements. (II, 249)

This ill-considered proposal brought an avalanche of criticism from all sides. In a rare display of solidarity, politicians and academicians from all major NATO countries joined in heaping scorn on the notion that the security of Western Europe was not best served by maintaining a high state of military readiness capable of territorial defense before rather than after invasion and occupation by the Red Army. Raymond Aron, perhaps the foremost French intellectual of the postwar period, attacked, in Kennan's words, "the very heart of my thesis: which was my opinion that the existing division of Europe was unsound, intolerable, and had to be changed." (II, 252-53) In a nutshell, Aron argued that although the present situation in Europe was indeed abnormal and even absurd any change would necessarily restore fluidity, thereby creating new uncertainties. In the prevailing political-strategic environment, he further reasoned, an equivocal situation was worse than an abnormal one. (II, 253)

Kennan was devastated by the massive public assault on his ideas, but he does not appear to have been shaken in his views. "Here, as on other occasions," he wrote, "the error was in the timing; and here again, it was the timing that was decisive." (II, 260) Even on the issue of military strategy, Kennan did not see any fallacy in his logic, only bad timing: "I am free to admit . . . that I was very foolish to say these things . . . I have had to learn in life . . . that in political matters truth prematurely uttered is of scarcely greater value than error." (II, 257) Notwithstanding, most observers no doubt agreed with Dean Acheson's judgment that Kennan "never grasped the realities of power relationships" but instead took a "rather mystical attitude toward them." (II, 250) This criticism would, of course, be repeated many times in the years following the fateful Reith Lectures.

The controversy gradually subsided after Kennan returned to his Ivory Tower at Princeton. He was teaching a graduate seminar as a visiting professor at Yale in January 1961 when newly-elected President John Kennedy called to offer him an appointment as ambassador to Yugoslavia or Poland. Kennan, flattered and eager for the opportunity to redeem himself in the eyes of the Foreign Service,
accepted. One can infer that he chose Yugoslavia because of its unique position of political independence in Eastern Europe.

As always, he embarked on this final tour of duty with youthful enthusiasm. Once again, the bubble soon burst. He had urged President Kennedy not to declare "Captive Nations Week" in accordance with a resolution passed in 1959 committing the U.S. to the "liberation" of 22 states including Yugoslavia. The President had agreed not to perform this ceremonial act but, much to Kennan's dismay, changed his mind at the last minute-apparently having succumbed to domestic political pressures. This incident was a harbinger of things to come. The Congress, displaying what Kennan depicts as appalling ignorance of Yugoslavia's situation, cut off foreign aid (largely gratuitous because Belgrade was receiving almost none at the time) and most-favored-nation treatment (which was anything but gratuitous). This last measure, unobtrusively inserted into the 1962 Trade Expansion Act, was taken despite Kennan's direct intercession with President Kennedy, who transferred his urgent call to Wilbur Mills, the powerful chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee. Mills was unsympathetic and the offending clause remained in the bill.

The rug pulled out from under him again by officials in Washington, Kennan resigned. In one sense, it was a fitting end to a public career that had been virtually without happy endings. Moreover, the fact that the final blow had been dealt by the most democratic branch of the government seemed to vindicate one of Kennan's pet axioms on the incompatibility of democracy and diplomacy-i.e., that when Congress allows special interests to influence and shape foreign policy it frequently does so at the expense of America's broader and more enduring national interests.

III

At the beginning of this article, we asked how Kennan's memoirs should be read. Three possibilities were suggested—as history, as political philosophy, or as literature. To the extent that these memoirs were intended to be a political autobiography, they should be judged by a political yardstick.

Despite his undisputed stature as an historian, Kennan as autobiographer is not immune to the same criticisms that can be levelled at most other autobiographers. Because it is an intensely personal account of diplomatic history from 1925-1963, Kennan's
treatment of this period lacks the objectivity, balance and comprehensiveness one would expect (and demand) from a more detached study. One does not, for example, get a sense of the real dangers that existed in Europe during the stressful 1945-1949 period. The U.S. had demobilized, Western Europe was devastated, the local Communist parties, especially in France and Italy were assertive, pro-Soviet and popular, and Stalinist armies occupied more real estate in the heart of Europe than any eastern conqueror since the Mongol invasions of the twelfth century. Furthermore, Europe had just been pillaged by a latterday Genghis Khan armed with a chauvinistic ideology and a totalitarian political system. Kennan consistently downplays the danger to Western Europe and makes excuses for the Soviet Union. In his view, both the seizure of Czechoslovakia and the Berlin Crisis of 1948 "were defensive reactions on the Soviet side to the initial success of the Marshall Plan and to the preparations then being undertaken on the Western side to set up a separate German government in Western Germany. They represented, like the Communist-inspired strike that France and Italy had just suffered in the autumn of 1947, Moscow's attempt to play, before it was too late, the various political cards it still possessed on the European continent." (II, 401) On the other hand, Kennan too lightly dismisses "Europe's sudden attack of military jitters" in the spring and summer of 1948 as though our NATO allies had no justification whatever for their pangs of insecurity.

Objectivity would require Kennan to apply the same standards of analytical benevolence to Western Europe-and, by logical extension, to the United States-that he is wont to apply to the Soviet Union. He bends over backwards in his efforts to be scrupulously fair to Moscow-so far at times that he falls on his own scruples. He seems to forget that objectivity consists not simply in seeing things from the other side's point of view-which is, after all, not so difficult as it is frequently made out to be—but in doing so without losing sight of the opposite viewpoint (i.e., that of one's own confederates).

Kennan appears to be the victim of a syndrome common among career diplomats—namely the tendency to become assimilated into the host culture, to sympathize with the plight of its people, and unwittingly to adopt its prejudices about the outside world (including the diplomat's own country). Having ventured this opinion, one must stress that Kennan's Russophilia is confined to the land, people, language and literature of Russia. That he abhors dogmatism
and despotism—the twin evils of all twentieth century totalitarian systems—is absolutely beyond doubt. That he detests the Leviathan-like obsession with security, loyalty and conformity which is the trademark of Soviet Communism is equally beyond doubt. (But, again, he detests *all* obsessions in politics, including what, in his view, is an American obsession with "Communism.")

Criticism of Kennan's historical and political objectivity inevitably leads to the philosophical question: Do these memoirs embody any real political wisdom? Is Kennan a profound thinker as well as a gifted storyteller? Is there perhaps a general theory of international politics implicit in these reflections on a turbulent diplomatic (and academic) career?

There is certainly nothing resembling a comprehensive, general theory of international politics awaiting the reader of these memoirs, nor is there a readily apparent core of assumptions and principles which consistently guide Kennan's analysis. Kennan's most valuable political insights are concentrated in two main areas: first (and foremost), the nature of the Soviet political system; second, the inherent difficulties of democratic foreign policy. We turn now to the former.

Little need be said about the quality of Kennan's analysis of Stalinist Russia. It was, in a word, brilliant. The shame is that he deserted his own precepts in taking the measure of Soviet policy following Stalin's death. What explains this strange inversion of intellect is precisely the absence of a political philosophy capable of distinguishing between facade and structure in Soviet politics, tactical shifts and strategic aims, personality changes and policy revisions. How else is one to explain why the same George Kennan who dissected the Soviet system with such consummate skill in the 1940s began the process of self-renunciation almost immediately after his departure from the government in 1950? This radical reversal of his fundamental views on the pivotal issue in postwar world politics—i.e., the magnitude and character of the Soviet threat—betrays the singular absence of a political theory, a solid framework, for interpreting political reality.

Indeed, where the Soviet Union is concerned, Kennan fails to distinguish altogether between appearance and reality in things political. He fails to understand the sense in which all political systems—especially absolute dictatorships possessing the modern technology of repression—seldom, if ever, change fundamentally of their own accord. As a distinguished scholar of history, Kennan
should appreciate this truth better than most. The October Revolu-
tion that toppled the tsarist regime did not occur without convulsive
violence-both war and revolution. Why should we believe that the
heirs to the Leninist dictatorship which emerged from those convul-
sions would wreak basic political changes of their own volition? If
such were, in fact, the case, they would be the first oligarchs in
history, who, disdaining social privilege and personal gratification,
surrendered a significant measure of their own political power
voluntarily and utterly free from effective internal or external
pressures to do so.

Of course, such is not the case. Lenin's system as modified by
Stalin is still very much in place. It is still a police state. The all-
encompassing ideology is still held inviolate, still infused into an im-
passive populace with a numbing intensity from the cradle to the
grave. Elections are still an empty and demeaning ritual-an instru-
ment of propaganda rather than popular self-government. There
has been no lifting of the crushing press censorship that gives the
Kremlin unsurpassed power over the perceptions and opinions of its
citizens. Finally the Soviet borders are still hermetically sealed-not
only against unauthorized entry but equally against unauthorized
exit. Until they are free, at the very least, to "love it or leave it," the
Soviet people will continue to have only the Orwellian "choice" of
loving it. Is it possible that he has forgotten all these things that he
once taught so many others?

Kennan's memoirs offer authentic insights into the inherent prob-
lems of foreign-policy formulation and execution in a democracy.
The great nemesis of political rationality in democratic societies, ac-
cording to Kennan, is the ubiquity of narrow and relentless special
interests. Kennan sees these pressure groups through the eyes of a
professional diplomatist-a perspective inadequately treated in
most of the literature on the subject. Unfortunately his allusions to
this problem tend to be rather oblique. For example, when he
puzzles over why the Long Telegram outlining Soviet motives and
methods caused such a stir inside the U.S. government in 1946, his
conclusion is that "it only goes to show that more important than the
observable nature of external reality [in] Washington's view of the
world, is the subjective state of readiness on the part of Washington
officialdom to recognize this or that feature of it." Conceding that
this condition is "natural" and perhaps "unavoidable," he asks
"whether a government so constituted should deceive itself into
believing that it is capable of conducting a mature, consistent, and
discriminating foreign policy. Increasingly, with the years, my answer would tend to be in the negative." (I, 295)

Kennan decries the politicization of the bureaucracy and the intrusion of the Congress into the foreign policy process, but he is especially contemptuous of the free-for-all individualism that at once distinguishes and debilitates American democracy. Congress is simply the institutional mirror that reflects and magnifies the fragmented face of American society. At work in the Congress we can see two of the most insidious tendencies of contemporary democracy in America-universalism and particularism. The former deprives the president of the flexibility needed in the formulation of long-term policy and strategy, while the latter insinuates all sorts of irrelevant considerations and imposes disadvantageous constraints on executive maneuverability in the conduct of day-to-day diplomacy. (I, 322-23)

The democratic impediment to rational policy was driven home to Kennan in his last official diplomatic assignment as ambassador to Yugoslavia. Congress, it will be recalled, wrote language into the 1962 trade bill forcing the White House to lump Yugoslavia together with the Soviet Union and its East European satellite states for trade and aid purposes. This benighted legislation wiped out everything Kennan was trying to accomplish as U.S. emissary in Belgrade. It is "pernicious," he wrote, because it "separates the ability to act in a sensitive question of foreign policy from the ability to discuss that action with a foreign government." In a "sensitive matter" such as U.S.-Yugoslav trade relations "where its own ignorance could scarcely have been greater, Congress would have been better advised to leave the conduct of foreign policy in the hands of those who had been constitutionally charged with it; because external interference of this nature, separating the power to shape policy from the power to discuss it with a foreign government, could only paralyze the process of diplomacy; it could scarcely improve it." (II, 298)

The question of Yugoslavia’s proper place in U.S. foreign policy is less important than the Kennanist principle it illustrates. Appropriately, it leads into the short but incisive epilogue with which Kennan concludes volume II of his memoirs. The career of an American diplomat, he observes, is "marked by a certain tragic contradiction." The Foreign Service Officer is charged with the custodianship of the national interest but is subordinated to individuals who are constantly preoccupied with domestic politics. The interests
decision-makers pursue "are not only often but usually in conflict with the requirement of a sensible national diplomacy." (II, 319) For the politicians to whose aims the career diplomats must cater, "the field of external relations presents itself ... as a means of producing this or that effect on the political scene." Only when the issue does not activate the machinery of special interests or when the nation is at (or near) war is American diplomacy "conducted solely for what appear to be its ostensible ends." (II, 320) Most of the time, unfortunately,

official Washington is inclined to view whatever happens in its own internal relationships as much more important than whatever is happening elsewhere in the world, or indeed in its relations with the rest of the world. The result is that the objectives of American diplomacy, as the career diplomatist is trained to see, tend to be different ones than those frequently reflected in the instructions he receives from his government. And since he is helpless to achieve what he considers to be his objectives without governmental support, these objectives are often not possible of achievement at all. (II, 320)

Moreover, this tawdry "exploitation of external relationships in the interests of political competition is a procedure dependent for its success precisely on the denial of its own nature." Hypocrisy, it seems, is indeed the tribute that vice pays to virtue in American diplomacy. Hence, if a congressman from Michigan representing a Detroit district favors protectionist policies for the U.S. auto industry he will invariably invoke lofty principles and wrap himself in the American flag. Never mind the damage such policies might do to U.S.-Japanese relations or to the general welfare of the American consumer.

To this democratic distortion of American diplomacy, Kennan refused to accommodate himself. It was this refusal that ultimately proved to be his undoing as a diplomat and even, perhaps, as a political thinker. It was (and is) utterly unrealistic to expect democratic leaders, whether elected or appointed, to ignore the realities of their own political predicament or to insulate foreign policy from the domestic political environment in which its formulation takes place. Kennan appears to recognize and admit his own limitations as a "realist" when he writes that while others could view the "turgid stirrings" of American domestic politics with tolerance and "resignation,"
Not so I. A stricter sense of administrative logic; a greater fastidiousness about the allotment of tasks and responsibilities; the sense of need for a neat and precise delimitation of functions; a preference for hierarchy and authority over compromise and manipulation; and a distaste amounting almost to horror for the chaotic disorder of the American political process: all these affected my view of political Washington. (II, 322)

Kennan's downfall as a policy-maker and opinion-shaper can be explained, at least in part, by his refusal to accept the political dimension of political realism as it applies to constitutional democracy. He never wanted to get his hands dirty: "the function of career diplomacy, was, as it appeared to me, a pure one: a matter of duty, dedication, reason and integrity." He thus confused realism with rationalism. Diplomacy was somehow supposed to be exempt from the passions and impulses inimical to pure reason-i.e., from the political imperfections so evident in our domestic affairs.

The foregoing confirms the accuracy of Kennan's self-description as an eighteenth-century man living in an alien time and place. Intellectually, he is an unreconstructed child of the Enlightenment. Reason is his passion. But this very passion prevented him from crossing the deep gorge that separates the career diplomat from the inspired statesman. The professional diplomat can abjure petty "politics" and imagine himself to be operating on a higher plane. But the amount of good he can accomplish in this somewhat illusory state of grace, as Kennan's memoirs so eloquently attest, is severely limited.

Kennan has at least glimpsed this truth: he seriously considered running for Congress shortly after leaving the State Department but withdrew his candidacy rather than give up his stipend and status as a scholar-in-residence at Princeton. If he truly wanted to change the way the U.S. government makes foreign policy or reshape the content of that policy, he ought to have run. Knowing what is good for the country is of little or no political consequence apart from the power to act on that knowledge. Such action in the public realm requires the bearer of practical wisdom to become political. Kennan, the man of thought, triumphed over the practical Kennan. He could not lower himself to the unheavenly level of domestic politics in America, which meant that no matter how profound his political insight he could never raise the level of America's foreign policy.

Kennan's failure in this regard begs another question: as a political thinker, did he not understand the futility of reason di-
vorced from power or, in the end, did he consciously choose the pristine pursuit of philosophical inquiry over the impurity of practical politics? His "second career" as a scholar suggests a conscious choice to forsake public service for a life of contemplation, but his frequent forays into the realm of foreign-policy criticism point to a different conclusion: he still seeks the mantle of elder statesman despite the fact that he stopped paying his dues long ago. Although he seems to embrace an Aristotelian concept of statesmanship, Kennan betrays a view of politics rooted more firmly in the Enlightenment than in classical Greek thought. His rationalistic attempt to effect policy change "from below" through a personal campaign of public education is as unrealistic in practice as it is laudable in theory.

*Augustana College*  
THOMAS MAGSTADT