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**Sarah-Jane Corke. *U.S. Covert Operations and Cold War Strategy: Truman, Secret Warfare and the CIA, 1945-53*.** 256 pp. London: Routledge, 2007. ISBN: 978-0-415-42077-8 (hardback, \$160.00); 978-0-203-01630-5 (eBook, £80.00).

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Introduction by Robert Jervis, Columbia University

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From the start, the role of psychological warfare and covert action has had a strange place in the historiography of the Cold War. Being surrounded by an air of mystery if not romance, they have loomed large for the general public and the media, which alternately glamorized and demonized them. But mystery means lack of documentary evidence, and so for decades historians pushed these topics to the margins. Slowly, however, secrets were spilled and documents were opened, leading to several important books: Scott Lucas, *Freedom's War: The American Crusade Against the Soviet Union*; Walter Hixson, *Parting the Curtain: Propaganda, Culture and the Cold War, 1945-1961*; Peter Grose, *Operation Rollback: America's Secret War Behind the Iron Curtain*; and Gregory Mitrovich, *Undermining the Kremlin: America's Strategy to Subvert the Soviet Bloc, 1947-1956*. These works showed that, contrary to what had been believed, the Anglo-American attempts to weaken or overthrow the Communist regimes in Eastern Europe and even the Soviet Union were serious, conducted on a large scale, and central to the strategy for waging the Cold War. They also revealed the father of many of these efforts to have been George Kennan, something that did not fit well with the picture of him as the mastermind of containment or with his later critiques of belligerent American policies.

Sarah-Jane Corke's *U.S. Covert Operations and Cold War Strategy: Truman, Secret Warfare and the CIA, 1945-53*, builds on these works, reinforcing the point made by earlier studies that, as Mitrovich puts it in his review, "There was unequivocally an offensive component to U.S. policy." Her main argument is that the failures of psychological warfare and covert action (concepts that overlap) were largely caused by and symptomatic of failures in the general American Cold War strategy. Covert operations under Truman were incoherent and contradictory in their operations, bureaucratic structures, and, even more, in their overall conception. It wasn't only that they were defeated by the Soviet Union, they also defeated themselves.

Part of the difficulties stemmed from the OSS heritage of a high degree of delegation to agents in the field. Wartime conditions, the youth of the organization, and the personalities involved all conspired to permit and indeed encourage a great deal of local initiative, with correspondingly little central control. One constant in the rapid post-war organizational changes was that the people involved in covert operations had cut their teeth in the OSS. They would have been a hard group to control under the best of conditions. These did not prevail as the area was characterized by extreme bureaucratic in-fighting and high conflict between the State Department and the military that could not be resolved by a central intelligence apparatus that was just developing and had weak leaders until Walter Bedell-Smith took over. Furthermore, the apparatus for coordination at higher levels was weak and Truman did not see the questions as being of high enough priority to merit their trying to impose his will on them.

Even more important, Corke argues, was the fact that incoherence resulted from the inability of either top leaders or those managing covert operations to rank their goals, choose a strategy, and match means with ends. For Corke, it is too simple to see this period

as characterized by containment, even if we view this approach as being quite capacious. From the start, holding the line against further Soviet expansion vied with the strategy of forcing a retraction of communist power, and after the split with Yugoslavia, of encouraging other Titos which meant accepting (at least temporarily) communist governments as long as they were not subservient to the USSR. Truman and his colleagues were simply unable to make up their minds as to which of these goals they should pursue, which meant that covert operations could not be firmly guided toward one objective. Coherence was further undermined by the fact that while the State Department thought mostly in terms of peacetime policies, the military wanted not only to prevent war, but to be prepared to fight it if necessary and so placed a high priority on cultivating networks in Eastern Europe and the USSR that would sabotage the Red Army when it started to move. Furthermore, especially when George Kennan took the lead, the State Department felt that binding policy papers were counterproductive because effective policy required flexibility.

All too often, then, policies were debated without answering—and often without asking—the crucial question of what the ends being sought were. A prefiguring of current debates can be found as policy-makers circled around the crucial question of whether the U.S. should seek to change its adversaries' behavior or their regimes. Policy-makers also failed to focus upon the central limitation on and tension raised by covert operations. On the one hand, they were adopted because more direct strategies ran too high a risk of war, yet if they began to really weaken the USSR, there was a great danger that it would fight. If too much success risked the war that had to be avoided, what was the point of the operations? If the policy succeeded in stimulating revolts in East Europe, as actually occurred later, the U.S. would have the unpalatable choice of declining to support them or running a high risk of triggering world war. In the event, the U.S. chose the former, which vividly illuminated the incoherence of the earlier policies.

The reviewers praise Corke's book, but raise questions.

**Betty Dessants** and **Gregory Mitrovich** note that Corke focuses so intensely on the bureaucratic maneuvering within the U.S. government that she loses sight of the general domestic and international context. The reader gets little sense of the fierce partisan battles that were being waged at home, let alone of what was happening abroad. European reconstruction, the Communist revolution in China, and the behavior of the Soviet Union are hardly mentioned. Corke's monograph is so detailed that it is likely to be read only by scholars who are familiar with the early Cold War and who will know what was happening outside the prizefight ring that holds Corke's attention, but the central question remains of the extent to which the incoherence she describes can be attributed to what was happening there or to events in the broader political world.

Was the fundamental problem with the policy that it was run incompetently or that given the Soviet hold on Eastern Europe and the strength of its security forces there and at home no program could have worked, **Rhodri Jeffreys-Jones** asks. Of course both may be true, but if the second claim is right, the import of the first is reduced.

Relatedly, **Jeffreys-Jones** and **Scott Lucas** raise the question of whether it is the American policy-makers or Corke herself who is muddled. Policy changes may reflect shifts in domestic politics and events in the external world, and the bureaucratic battles described are at least in part attempts to deal with multiple values and difficult choices. **Jeffreys-Jones** then sees “flexibility” rather than a muddle. Furthermore, by narrowly focusing on policy disputes, Corke may underestimate areas of agreement.

By focusing only on the early Cold War years, she cannot say whether the policy was characterized by more contradictions than was the case in later periods. **Jefferys-Jones** notes the importance of the claim that “Truman’s officials were particularly incompetent,” but Corke does not try to show that things were different with other administrations.

Although the reviewers generally praise Corke’s archival research, **Jeffreys-Jones** raises questions about her analysis of the unfortunately-famous covert action in Albania and **Mitrovich** believes that she goes too far to call containment a “myth.”

George Kennan looms large in Corke’s account as he does in other books about covert operations. While she does further undermine the older portrait of Kennan as seeking to conciliate the Soviet Union, **Lucas** asks whether she shares with earlier accounts the error of making too much of his role.

In reply, Corke defends her privileging of domestic over international factors as reflecting both the course of the history and her own revisionist and postmodern approach.

### Participants:

**Sarah-Jane Corke** is an assistant professor at Dalhousie University in Halifax, Nova Scotia. She graduated with a Ph.D. from the University of New Brunswick in 2000. Her first book is on American Covert Operations during the Truman Administration. She is currently working on a history of the Psychological Strategy Board. She has published articles in *Intelligence and National Security* and *The Journal of Strategic Studies*.

**Betty A. Dessants** received her PhD from the University of California at Berkeley and is associate professor of history at Shippensburg University where she specializes in post-1945 United States history, particularly Cold War foreign relations and society. Her publications focus on World War II and Cold War intelligence as well as the teaching of history in high schools during the Cold War. She is also a co-author of *The Chicago Handbook for Teachers: A Practical Guide to the College Classroom*. Her current project examines secondary and university education and the Cold War.

**Rhodri Jeffreys-Jones** received his B.A. from the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth (now Aberystwyth University) and his Ph.D. from the University of Cambridge. He is Emeritus Professor of American History and an Honorary Professorial Fellow at the University of Edinburgh. His books include *The CIA and American Democracy* (1989) and *The FBI: A History* (2007), both published by Yale University Press. His next book will be

*The Triumph of the American Left: A Hidden Story* for the University of California Press, and he is under contract to Oxford University Press and researching for a book provisionally titled *In Spies We Trust: A History of International Intelligence and National Security in the West*.

**Robert Jervis** is Adlai E. Stevenson Professor of International Politics at Columbia University. He has written a number of books including *American Foreign in a New Era* (Routledge, 2005) and *Why Intelligence Fails: Lessons from the Fall of the Shah and Iraqi WMD* (2010), the subject of a forthcoming H-Diplo roundtable. He was President of the American Political Science Association in 2000-01 and in 2006 received the national Academy of Sciences' tri-annual award for contributions of behavior science toward avoiding nuclear war. He is co-editor of the Cornell Studies in Security Affairs.

**Scott Lucas** is Professor of American Studies at the University of Birmingham, United Kingdom. He is the author of more than 40 major books and articles on British and U.S. foreign policy since 1945, including *Freedom's War: The U.S. Crusade Against the Soviet Union, 1945-1956* and the recent *Diplomatic History* article, "Illusions of Coherence: George Kennan and U.S. Political Warfare in the Early Cold War". He is currently completing a book on the foreign policy of the George W. Bush administration while running the internationally-prominent website *Enduring America* ([www.enduringamerica.com](http://www.enduringamerica.com)) on contemporary U.S. foreign policy and international relations.

**Gregory Mitrovich** is a Research Scholar at the Arnold A. Saltzman Institute for War and Peace Studies, Columbia University. He is the author of *Undermining the Kremlin: America's Strategy to Subvert the Soviet Bloc, 1947-1956* (Cornell University Press, 2000) which was awarded the Stuart L. Bernath Prize for outstanding book from the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations. He has been a fellow at the John M. Olin Institute for Strategic Studies at Harvard University, the Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government, and the Center for International Security and Cooperation, Stanford University. He was a member of the Hoover Institution's *Impact of Cold War Broadcasting on the Iron Curtain*, as well as the *Communicating with the Muslim World* project directed by Secretary of State George Shultz. He is currently completing a book project entitled "Tempering Hatred: Anti-Americanism, Public Diplomacy, and the Origins of the American Century."

Did government bureaucracy make a difference in the determination and outcome of United States national security policy during the early Cold War? Or was U.S. policy shaped primarily by larger international and domestic events and conditions? Or was it some shifting and complex combination of all of these factors that created U.S. Cold War policy? After reading Sarah-Jane Corke's analysis of policymaking, strategy, and covert operations in Eastern Europe and Asia during the Truman administration, I think she would answer yes to the first question, no to the second, and maybe to the third. In her detailed examination of the Truman administration's struggle to define a clear policy that would guide strategic operations in the waging of a covert cold war against the Soviets, Corke argues that the administration could never decide what it wanted. Its policy goals shifted with the myriad agencies and outlooks of their personnel who were responsible for advising the president on national security. As a result, Corke argues, covert operations suffered from ad hoc planning and execution because they lacked guidance as to their ultimate objectives. By her own admission, rather than focusing on international events of those years, she investigates "internal factors" of "ideology, partisan politics, personality and bureaucratic politics" that pervaded the defense and intelligence agencies of the Truman White House.<sup>(8)</sup> More importantly, Corke situates her study in the larger context of the bureaucratic struggle to define the elusive policy of "containment," which meant different things to different people at different times between 1946 and 1953, the crucial early years when the U.S. was trying to develop a coherent political, economic, and military strategy for dealing with its new rival. Corke builds on the earlier work of Walter Hixson, Gregory Mitrovich, and Scott Lucas, all of whom challenged the argument that containment had a singular meaning.<sup>1</sup>

Corke is most interested in the nascent policy-planning and intelligence agencies that were just beginning to take shape, particularly those that planned psychological warfare and covert operations under the moniker of "political warfare." Through close analysis of policy planning papers and memoranda of the State Department's Policy Planning Staff, National Security Council (N.S.C.), the Central Intelligence Agency's (C.I.A.) Office of Policy Coordination, and the Psychological Strategy Board (P.S.B.), Corke lays out the range of views concerning the U.S.'s course of action against the perceived threat of Soviet communism and its expansion. These included George F. Kennan's vaguely-defined idea of containment, Paul Nitze's belief in "rollback," the Yugoslavian example of "Titoism," and "liberation" as later advocated by John Foster Dulles, at least in his public pronouncements. Corke demonstrates convincingly that the various national security agencies not only differed amongst themselves about the ultimate goals of U.S. policy vis a vis the Soviets but

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<sup>1</sup> See Walter Hixson, *George F. Kennan: Cold War Iconoclast* (NY: Columbia University Press, 1989); Gregory Mitrovich, *Undermining the Kremlin: America's Strategy to Subvert the Soviet Bloc, 1947-1956* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000); Scott Lucas, *Freedom's War: The American Crusade Against the Soviet Union* (New York: New York University Press, 1999). Appearing after the publication of Corke's book is Scott Lucas and Kaeten Mistry, "Illusions of Coherence: George F. Kennan, U.S. Strategy and Political Warfare in the Early Cold War, 1946-1950" *Diplomatic History* 33:1 (January 2009): 39-66.

also inflamed interagency rivalries as they deliberated, which in turn made it more difficult to reach agreement. Furthermore, when agencies finally did agree, their final policy statements were usually so vague and watered down that they offered little clear direction for their implementation through covert operations. And what do we make of President Harry Truman's involvement in all of this? Corke contends that Truman "never brought the full power of the presidency to bear on the one problem that was tearing his administration apart" and, as such, he "failed to play an instrumental role in guiding the administration's Cold War policy." (139)

Although her close analysis of the national security and intelligence bureaucracy can leave the reader a bit overwhelmed in acronyms, Corke's story is an important one that is too often ignored by historians who find the nitty-gritty details of the policy process tedious. Yet the "bureaucratic politics perspective" can be very important to disentangle policy origins. In an essay on this approach, J. Garry Clifford points out, "There is no single 'maker' of foreign policy. Policy flows instead from an amalgam of large organizations and political actors who differ substantially on any particular issue and who compete to advance their own personal and organizational interests as they try to influence decisions." He notes that this approach is particularly useful when organizations are confronted with "major transformations in the international system" that require "institutional adjustments in U.S. policies."<sup>2</sup> Corke makes it clear that the multi-faceted nature of containment resulted from not just the opinions and personalities of Truman's advisors but also the agendas of individual departments and agencies, each of which was determined to defend its traditional role in policymaking. In the absence of clear policy directives from the president, the State Department, Defense Department (after its creation in 1947), N.S.C., and C.I.A. attempted to fill the vacuum but with little success. Corke points out that ad hoc and newly-created interagency committees were no better at speaking with one voice on policy goals. The Psychological Strategy Board provides a good example of the difficulties. Founded in 1951 under a generally-worded directive from Truman, the P.S.B.'s function was to provide guidance to other government departments and agencies involved in psychological operations. Aside from the problem of defining "psychological operations" and figuring out exactly what it was supposed to do, the P.S.B. board drew its members from "top officials" of the State and Defense Departments, the N.S.C., and the C.I.A. At first glance, its composition made it appear decisive, but, in reality, its members "owed their allegiance" to their individual departments. (121) Corke argues that "because the P.S.B.'s mandate included everything from clarifying policy through operational oversight, as the board began operating it came under fire from the government departments, on whose jurisdictional toes it appeared to tread. And given that it depended on those same organizations to secure money, supplies and manpower, the result was somewhat less than anticipated." (120) Ultimately, P.S.B. papers never reconciled the competing strategic visions of its members and gave very little guidance to covert operations; as a result, the board "had very little support" within the Truman administration by mid-1952. (136)

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<sup>2</sup> J. Garry Clifford, "Bureaucratic Politics," in *Explaining the History of American Foreign Relations*, eds. Michael J. Hogan and Thomas G. Paterson (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 142, 147-48.

While Corke's analysis of these competing strategic visions emphasizes bureaucratic machinations, she has little interest in the international events and domestic national politics in the period. Although she acknowledges this in her introduction and states that she is not "suggesting that American strategy was developed in a vacuum," her lack of attention to the international context in particular leaves her readers with only one part of the story.<sup>(8)</sup> Given the massive changes in European and Asian geopolitics along with the growth of the nuclear capabilities of both the U.S. and U.S.S.R. between 1945 and 1953, the Truman administration's vacillations in policy may have resulted as much from world events as they did from bureaucratic politics and the machinery of the national security process. Occasionally, she does refer to historical contingency in passing, which only serves to tantalize the reader, hoping for more discussion. For example, the State and Defense Departments differed about which department should plan foreign policy if the U.S. were under a threat of war or actually at war. "The military wanted clear and precise guidance on which to base operations, but the [State Department's] Policy Planning Staff refused to codify strategy." (103) These different approaches surfaced during the debates on NSC-59, a "policy paper designed to coordinate the foreign information program." The final paper provided that "until hostilities actually broke out, the State Department would maintain policy control of psychological warfare and covert operations." (103-104) After North Korea invaded South Korea in June 1950, Corke contends that "the differences between State and Defense took on a whole new meaning." (104) But that meaning is not clear as Corke lets the Korean War drop from the rest of the discussion. She treats - or does not treat - the domestic politics of anti-Communism, accusations of espionage, and the activities of Senator Joseph McCarthy in a similar way. They are mentioned to remind the reader of the political backdrop to her discussion of internal bureaucratic debates and the planning of covert operations, but she does not elaborate on their larger significance to either. Yet she recognizes the importance of national politics when she cites the Republican party's attacks on Truman for his seemingly inconsistent and incoherent policy on the Soviets in 1952, an election year. And she points out that Dwight D. Eisenhower's advocacy of "liberation" policy was good for him politically: it gave the potential Republican presidential nominee a distinctively different approach to the Soviets while placating the right wing of his party. (148-49)

Perhaps national politics played more of a role in why and how containment policy shifted between the various alternatives and times than Corke allows in her approach to the issue. Despite these criticisms, and in fairness to Corke's stated intention not "to write a history of the Cold War" but to instead concentrate on the gap between strategic policy and operations, her book succeeds admirably. She has untangled the bureaucratic web that produced competing visions of Cold War strategy and demonstrated the difficulties in planning and implementing covert operations that relied, at least in part, on clear objectives for their success. She has also added a fresh perspective to the historical debate on the meaning of containment and how the United States developed policy in the crucial early stage of the Cold War. Finally she provides a prescient commentary on the myriad determinants of policy and strategy that are often shaped as much from the bottom up as the top down within the policy-making bureaucracy.

Sarah-Jane Corke describes herself as a “postmodern Canadian woman living in an age of uncertainty, ambiguity and war” (9). This, she declares, has colored the way she reads the documents on the formative period of post-World War II U.S. covert operations. Her aim in undertaking a reassessment of the evidence is to offer a “more nuanced appreciation of American strategic thinking during the Truman administration” (4). She presents the result as “a history that falls well within the ‘revisionist’ school of Cold War historiography” (9).

Corke distinguishes her approach from what she portrays as the main previous schools of thought on her subject. She rejects the idea that Harry Truman’s foreign policy was about containment. She equally dismisses the notion that its aim was rollback or liberation. Nor does she think that there was a systematic attempt to split the communist world by cultivating Marshal Josip B. Tito, the independent-minded leader of Yugoslavia. Instead, she advances the thesis that incoherence was the chief characteristic of the Truman administration’s Cold War policy. She is not saying that history is generally a muddle; rather, she advances the hypothesis that Truman’s officials were particularly incompetent.

Corke advances her case by documenting the chaotic power and policy struggles that took place within the Truman administration. She then turns to a case study, the unsuccessful Anglo-American attempt to overthrow the communist regime of Enver Hoxha in Albania. She argues that the mistakes made in the process of this covert operation confirm the muddled nature of Truman’s policy. She adds that officials failed to learn the lessons suggested by the Albanian debacle, and went on to repeat the mistakes in subsequent operations in Eastern Europe.

Sarah-Jane Corke has an eye for fresh detail. For example, she opens her introduction with the well-known story of how, in the aftermath of the disastrous Bay of Pigs operation, Truman denounced covert operations and denied that he had, when president, been the instigator of the program. She then encapsulates the Albanian misadventure, reciting the now received opinion that while the MI-6 traitor Kim Philby must have betrayed the operation’s plan to the communists, they would already have known about it from several other sources. However, she refreshes this familiar story with a revelation about Tony Blair’s comment on the operation – to the Albanian newspaper *Korrieri* in 2004. Though the U.K. premier is likely to be forever remembered for his own damaging manipulation of W.M.D. intelligence, Corke reveals that in Blair’s view the Albanian operation was one of the worst blunders by British intelligence in its entire history.

Corke is surely correct in arguing that the Psychological Strategy Board had a “vague charter” (120). Its mission, poorly defined as it was, had to do with black propaganda and covert operations. The word “psychological” was hardly appropriate. Its use probably had to do with the contemporary vogue for Freud and with the associated middle class need for having a psychiatrist as a fashion accessory. In exculpation of Truman’s Cold Warriors,

though, it might be observed that they did not initiate the misapplication of the term. It was already in military use in World War II.

This leads into a more general issue of temporal comparison. In her conclusion, Corke suggests that the Eisenhower administration “failed to resolve the same underlying tension in American strategic thinking that had haunted the Democrats” (161). As she sees muddle in the next administration as well, she is open to the suspicion that she has not *characterized* the Truman administration. Perhaps unintentionally, Corke implies that incompetence was not exclusively the prerogative of the Truman administration. But this does not to advance our understanding of the particular period she had undertaken to analyze.

Corke’s argument itself is also rather muddled at times. Her penchant for “nuance” has held her back from crafting a coherent interpretation of the mass of administrative detail and bureaucratic maneuvering. In her defense, she has in this way succumbed to a danger that has afflicted several other historians of secret intelligence. Many analytical and operational details remain masked for obvious reasons. Historians are left to pick over the administrative bones. They can become obsessed by them, and can mistake them for the real story.

Whatever one thinks of Truman, his main intelligence goal is plain. In July 1946, he asked the Central Intelligence Group to work against the Soviet Union, and its very first report to the president did precisely that. This evidence appears in a source listed in Corke’s bibliography. Truman never wavered from his goal of preventing or slowing down the expansion of international communism. Naturally, he allowed his officials to experiment and to debate the means to be used. After all he was a professional politician and a pragmatist. But flexibility is not the same as muddle.<sup>1</sup>

Corke is not the first historian of U.S. covert operations to ignore historical context, but she has certainly joined the throng. She makes no mention of the case for non-intervention in the internal affairs of other countries. In an important historical precedent, President Franklin D. Roosevelt agreed to a Western Hemispheric non-intervention policy at the Montevideo conference in 1933. He recognized that gunboat diplomacy was counter productive.

With the outbreak of the Cold War, there was a change in emphasis. Attributed to leftist elements, the Bogotá riots of 1948 were the immediate stimulus, or at least rationale, for the change. Because of Bogotá, the Organization of American States responded to U.S. pressure and relaxed its ban on intervention. The United States still considered it more prudent to avoid overt interventions, and moved to covert means. It was this pre-Albanian backyard policy shift that assumed global dimensions. Corke makes only slight reference to

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<sup>1</sup> Clark M. Clifford to William D. Leahy, 18 July 1946, and CIG, ORE 1, “Soviet Foreign and Military Policy,” 23 July 1946, both in Michael Warner, ed., *CIA Cold War Records: The CIA under Harry Truman* (Washington, D.C.: Center for the Study of Intelligence, CIA, 1994), 63, 66-69.

Bogotá, stigmatizing the event as a U.S. intelligence failure but failing to discuss it as a significant event in covert operational history.

When the C.I.A. secretly undermined democracy in one country after another in the name of democracy, it was injurious to America's already shaky reputation.<sup>2</sup> America seemed to be acting against its democratic ideals and admitting its shame by being secretive. All this was against the World War II background of dropping two atomic weapons on non-white civilian cities. The point here is not about the reasons for or immediate effectiveness of the bombing decision, but about its impact on the political context of future American initiatives. A covert and disingenuous program to win the hearts and minds of the people of non-aligned nations? There is a strong case for saying it was a non-starter. Corke describes herself as a Canadian "revisionist" historian. If Corke's argument is merely that covert operations were run in a muddled manner, she sounds less like a revisionist than a United States Cold Warrior demanding better results.

Her belief in nuance notwithstanding, Corke's discussion of Albania displays a weakness for subjective simplicities. This, we learn, was a nation with a "populace" (97). The "majority of the population were believed to be Muslims" (82). An empty canvas, then. "Greeks" were annoyed at Hoxha's support for the communists in the Greek civil war (83). When Italian special forces landed in Albania to try to foment an anti-communist uprising, the Albanian authorities "unfortunately" arrested them (93). When small numbers of British and American special forces were arrested, killed, or expelled in the course of covert operations there, this was a "terrible human cost" (100).

Setting aside the issue of whether such operations were a good idea in the first place, the Albanian adventure had blemishes that Corke does not address. So far as we can tell, Hoxha had the solid support of the people Corke calls the "populace". The supposedly anti-communist nationalist elements were in disarray, and disunited. The tactics used in 1949-1954 had already been tried with mixed success in World War II. Far from achieving surprise, the CIA used the same landing places as agents from Britain's Special Operations Executive in the recent war. Corke cites an article by the chief authority on all this, Roderick Bailey, but twice mis-spells his name and gives the wrong volume number for the journal.<sup>3</sup> Corke's book would be vastly improved were it more accurate, more objective, and more historical.

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<sup>2</sup> The American journalist Thomas B. Morgan undertook tour of the non-communist world in the 1960s to research the reasons for America's unpopularity. He concluded that the Vietnam War made his country unpopular, as did the memory of McCarthyism and the impact of U.S. economic power. But "above all, virtually the whole world" resented "our postwar interventionism" especially that of the C.I.A.: Morgan, *The Anti-Americans* (London: Michael Joseph, 1967), 9-10.

<sup>3</sup> Bailey is "Baile" on pages 197 and 228. The article is Bailey, "OSS-SOE Relations, Albania 1943-1944," *Intelligence and National Security*, 15:2 (Summer 2000): 20-35. Corke wrote "vol. 1". Bailey's book on special operations in Albania came out too recently for Corke to have used it in her own work. It concentrates on World War II, but contains some brief comments on the years 1949-54: *The Wildest Province: SOE in the Land of the Eagle* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2008), 327-331.

In the last decade scholarship on U.S. foreign policy has caught up with Harry Truman's 1963 assertion, "The last thing [the U.S.] needed was for the CIA to be seized upon as something akin to a subverting influence in the affairs of other people", and the exposés of covert activities in memoirs (Philip Agee, Miles Copeland), investigative reports (Victor Marchetti and John Marks), and narrative histories (John Ranelagh). Authors such as Peter Grose, Greg Mitrovich, etc. have documented the extent of U.S. covert operations which not only sought to secure "containment" in Western Europe but pursued "liberation" in the eastern half of the continent, as well as intervening in arenas from China to Syria.<sup>1</sup> More importantly, academics have gone beyond the treatment of this covert dimension as an annex to U.S. foreign policy to interrogate notions such as "psychological operations" and "political warfare" and to consider their place within an American strategy in the early years of the Cold War.

Sarah Jane Corke's book, the product of many years of research and development, is a useful addition to this literature. While its impact has been blunted by the appearance of parallel monographs on the Truman Administration's approach to covert operations, Corke's narrative adds further documentation. Had this book appeared at the start of the decade, it would undoubtedly be at the forefront of work on the CIA and U.S. foreign policy, with Corke's claim of a "gap in the historiography" of the Cold War and her revision of "the tradition argument....that [American psychological operations] were suspended in 1945 and ... began anew only after the passage of NSC 4-A [in December 1947]"; however, with the evolution of work on the interaction between covert action and American strategy, Corke faces the challenge: what is the significance of her revelations?

There are false starts in her effort. The notion of the "legacy of William Donovan", the head of the wartime Office of Strategic Services, is introduced but fortunately --- given the lack of material support -- soon set aside. More significant is Corke's claim that covert action emerged not through a process of coherent development of strategy and policy but with the Truman Administration's failure "to come up with a workable policy-process" and with the nature of "the bureaucratic machinery put in place between 1947 and 1952" (6). The story of U.S. covert operations thus becomes an important part of the "inadequacy of integrated strategic planning" (7) rather than the thoughtful pursuit of containment of the Soviet bloc.

Corke thoroughly documents examples of the tensions in the discussion of covert action, such as the conflict between George Kennan's State Department Policy Planning Staff and the nascent CIA, as well as attempted resolutions such as the creation of the Office for Policy Coordination -- the lead agency for covert action -- in June 1948. The drawback in

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<sup>1</sup> See Philip Agee, *Inside the Company: CIA Diary* (1984); Miles Copeland, *The Game of Nations: The Amoral Politics of Power* (1969); Victor Marchetti, *The CIA and the Cult of Intelligence* (1974); John Marks, *The CIA File* (1976); John Ranelagh, *The Agency: The Rise and Decline of the CIA* (1981); Peter Grose's *Operation Rollback America's Secret War Behind the Iron Curtain* (2000); and Greg Mitrovich *Undermining the Kremlin: America's Strategy to Subvert the Soviet Bloc, 1947-1956* (2000);

her analysis is that she is quick to pin the blame on Kennan for the failure to resolve those bureaucratic disputes with his “refusal to clarify American policy”. Kennan's later anointing by historians as the master strategist, which Corke is implicitly kicking against, should not obscure the reality that in mid-1948 he was a mid-level official in a new “national security state” with new agencies and hundreds of often competing actors.

Fortunately, Corke remedies that generalisation in a chapter documenting the confusion in U.S. strategy in 1948-49. In the strongest section of the book, she draws out the vagaries and uncertainties in the first blueprint for U.S. action against Soviet Communism, NSC 20/4 of November 1948, and regional approaches such as NSC 58/2 (September 1949) on Eastern Europe. This is a powerful case for “the contradictions inherent in American policy [between] the public myth of containment, the State Department's new policy of Titoism, and OPC's plans for liberating the satellites” (78).

After reaching this high point, the book drifts somewhat in the second half. Corke falls back on the unhelpful reduction of pointing at the clay feet of Kennan -- one could argue in response to Corke's elevation of him as the primary, flawed strategist that, by spring 1949, Kennan was marginal in policy formation -- and a somewhat exaggerated narrative of OPC's maverick operations. She continues to narrate the bureaucratic disputes and inconclusive strategic deliberations, including those leading up to and after NSC 68 of 1950 but never reaches the level of critique that applies to the period in late 1948. The outcome is a book which does not conclude as much as stop with the advent of the Eisenhower Administration in 1953.

This should not diminish Corke's contribution to the emerging, vital critique of U.S. foreign policy in the early Cold War. In a rich vein of scholarship moving beyond the framings of a coherent and triumphant American approach in the years after 1945, this consideration of covert action, not as an exotic add-on to strategy and policy but as a dimension contributing to and illuminating the tensions and incomplete resolutions at the highest levels of the U.S. Government, is to be welcomed. It is this re-interrogation and re-interpretation that takes us, almost 20 years after its supposed end, far beyond what we supposedly know about Washington and the Cold War.

Beginning in 1997 the publications of Walter Hixson's, *Parting the Curtain*, Scott Lucas' *Freedom's War*, Peter Grose's *Operation Rollback*, and my own contribution, *Undermining the Kremlin* radically challenged conventional Cold War history. Since George Kennan's epic 1947 *Foreign Affairs* article "The Sources of Soviet Conduct," it was the common belief that America's national security policy sought to contain Soviet power and prevent Soviet expansion along the Eurasian periphery. Yes, there had been rumblings from time to time that the United States needed to take "the initiative" with the Soviets and "rollback" communism when possible. But, except for the disastrous crossing of the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel to rollback communism on the Korean peninsula, which resulted in the communist Chinese nearly rolling the U.S. and its allies into the Pacific Ocean, and *Operation Valuable*, the poorly planned and incompetently executed effort to infiltrate and overthrow the communist Albanian regime, most of this talk was political bravado designed for domestic consumption and political electioneering, but certainly nothing that the Soviets need be concerned over. Indeed *Operation Valuable* failed so miserably that it convinced most of the scholarly Cold War establishment to assume that "rollback" was never a serious policy tool.

Then in 1994 President Bill Clinton signed Executive Order 12958 which, very briefly, allowed for the release of an important set of documents exploring U.S. covert action and psychological warfare behind the Iron Curtain. Suddenly, for the first time archival documentation was available which clearly demonstrated that U.S. policy far exceeded the mere containment of Soviet expansion allowing for significant scholarly work in one of the most mysterious areas of U.S. history. This evidence demonstrated that American policy makers aimed to nothing less than the overthrow of the Soviet regime and the destruction of the Soviet system itself—hence the title of my book *Undermining the Kremlin*.

These tens of thousands of pages of documents collected primarily from the files of the White House, National Security Council, State Department, and CIA showed that the United States did more than just aspire; indeed they indicated significant levels of planning designed to foment uprisings throughout the Soviet bloc and even within the Soviet Union itself. Presidentially approved NSC papers regularly used such phrases as "place the maximum strain on Soviet power;" "foment revolutions in selected satellite states" and called for the "establishment of friendly regimes not under Kremlin control."<sup>1</sup> These papers, prepared by the administration's most important advisors, including Kennan, Paul Nitze and others, were accompanied by top secret action plans prepared by State, the CIA and several interdepartmental groups tasked with achieving U.S. objectives. What did all this mean?

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<sup>1</sup> See NSC 68 in Thomas Etzold and John Lewis Gaddis ed, *Containment: Documents on American Strategy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978) pp. 435-436.

For Hixson, Lucas, Grose, and myself, it meant that U.S. policy was more than just a defensive, hold-the-line action we have called containment; it meant that there was unequivocally an offensive component to U.S. policy that actively sought the collapse of the Soviet system—a far cry from the conventional belief that the Soviet system would eventually collapse if could no longer expand. While Hixson focused primarily on cultural penetration of the Iron Curtain in the latter part of the 1950s and 60s, Lucas, Grose, and I argued that the instruments of American policy included aggressive psychological warfare and covert capabilities that would seek to destabilize the Soviet power block. From our research we saw how this effort permeated U.S. policies, how covert ops and psychological warfare quickly became standard tools of all U.S. interventions throughout the world.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, we both examined how the U.S. government was able to mobilize American civil-society and academia to aid in this anti-communist offensive. Many of American society’s most important members, foundations like the Ford and Carnegie Foundations funneled money to various U.S. agencies to enact aggressive covert action behind the Iron Curtain. Academics at America’s most respected institutions volunteered to work on projects perfecting psychological warfare, or understanding Soviet vulnerabilities. Indeed, when one explores the lists of scholars who took part in these exercises it is clear just how important these government programs were to the development of a wide variety of academic fields such as Soviet studies, political psychology, public opinion polling, and sociology, to name a few.<sup>3</sup>

We published our books and received slews of good reviews and academic distinctions, and then . . . the subject dropped off the radar screen. Few new works were published throughout the current decade, and the subject didn’t even qualify for a chapter in the three volume, two thousand page, *Cambridge History of the Cold War*. Indeed, even the massive outpouring of work on the subject of public diplomacy has barely raised interest in this area. With the extensive American political and psychological warfare efforts during the cold war, one would have thought more interest would have been brought to this field—but it didn’t happen.

Therefore, it is with great pleasure that I review Sarah-Jane Corke’s *U.S. Covert Operations and Cold War Strategy*, the first new book on the subject in nearly a decade that offers a significant advance on our understanding of the evolution of U.S. policy to destabilize the communist bloc. Corke traces the evolution of American psychological warfare from the final days of World War II until Dwight D. Eisenhower took office as President of the United States in January of 1953. While Corke and I have some scholarly differences—as will be discussed below—I want to make clear that this book is a first-rate study that adds considerably to what Hixson, Grose, Lucas and I have done. Corke’s research is truly

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<sup>2</sup> See as well Christopher Simpson’s *The Science of Coercion* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1994).

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*

exemplary, particularly in threading the relationship between the early postwar clandestine services and the CIA as well as the numerous agencies created in later years. Her work ably fills the scholarly vacuum from 1945-1947 which conventional history has always assumed to be a period bereft of any coordinated anti-Soviet activity. Corke demonstrates that this was not the case and provides a cogent analysis explaining how the early postwar period represented a continuation with rather than a break from the World War II era. It is clear that Corke has done a great job marshalling documentation from many different sources—her research in this incredibly murky area adds tremendously to our knowledge, illuminating how departments responsible for psychological warfare during the conflict were reorganized or eliminated. Indeed one of Corke's most important contributions is her demonstration that significant elements of the World War II covert action apparatus actually survived the massive postwar purge and continued to pursue psychological warfare activities in Europe until the creation of the CIA in 1947—her discussion is one the best in print.

### *The Argument*

Corke's study is premised on three controversial arguments. First, that the concept of containment was a "myth" accidentally created by George Kennan in his *Foreign Affairs* article "The Sources of Soviet Conduct" and propagated by Cold War historians, namely John Lewis Gaddis. This is a strong charge to make and the weakest of Corke's contentions—indeed, I am not quite sure of its relevance to her argument (aside from a nod to postmodernism). Corke applies an almost conspiratorial tone to her discussion as she contends that "the principal architect of the myth of containment was historian John Lewis Gaddis." "If George Kennan is today characterized as the 'father of containment'" Corke writes, "Gaddis could be considered the concepts godfather" (40). Corke points out, correctly, that Gaddis's portrayal of containment as the *sine qua non* of U.S. policy obscures the broader picture of U.S. objectives during the early cold war. But I disagree with her argument that this was done to "reinforce the ideals of a nation", in this case the United States, in order to promote the belief that the U.S. was merely responding to Soviet provocations rather than "aggressively challenging their legitimate national security interests." (39) To call containment a "myth" goes too far.

Containment was a well entrenched concept in Cold War historiography decades before Gaddis came on the scene, even the great Cold War revisionists William Appleman Williams and Gabriel Kolko, who zealously blamed the Cold War on expansionist American economic policies, used the phrase. I agree that containment was a euphemism for a series of policies that included efforts to strengthen the free world as well as destabilize the Soviet block, but the term wasn't used to prop up misguided historical beliefs, it was something that caught on and no one has found a better alternative (indeed, as Corke points out the term rollback is just as problematic). And, it should not be forgotten until the last decade the field was bereft of significant academic scholarship upon which the field could rely—indeed, the only real works were those of investigative journalists. While I share Corke's frustration that Cold War historiography still fails to recognize the importance of this destabilization campaign and its ramifications for global U.S. policy, particularly in the third world, I blame intellectually lethargy, not a conspiracy to promote an American self-image.

Corke is on far stronger ground with her second crucial argument—that the true American policy of rollback never had a chance to succeed because the administration of President Harry Truman failed to arrive at any coherent strategy to achieve the broad and ambitious objectives of American policy: that is to rollback Soviet power and influence in Europe and ultimately instigate the collapse of Soviet power. According to Corke, from 1945-1953, the American administration put forth a series of national security objectives that were frequently in conflict with each other. Was American strategy containment in its traditional guise, was it rollback as the U.S. tried to achieve on the Korean peninsula, was it the support of Titoism and the wedge strategy, or was it instead to support democratic revolutions and, ultimately, the overthrow of the communist system? Corke believes that this litany of strategies only confused psych-warfare planners—and she is correct, there are big differences between each strategic variant. Encouraging Titoism, for instance, meant working with and even strengthening an existing communist regime in order to survive Stalin’s devastating riposte, however, this effectively precludes any efforts to work with oppositional forces within that society. This left American planners in a lurch, just how were they to prepare their covert operations if they weren’t even sure of either the objective of the operations or the target to be attacked?

Corke’s third important contention is that the international context played little role in the evolution of this strategy, instead efforts failed due to “internal factors—ideology, partisan politics, personality and bureaucratic policies” which “took precedence over geopolitical considerations.” To begin with this makes for a very claustrophobic story especially when one considers the tumultuous events occurring throughout the world, but more importantly it forces the actors of the story to themselves abandon the international context in their own deliberations. Is it really conceivable that top State Department and CIA officials would not have considered global events as they debated the efficacy of aggressive covert action against America’s most important adversary? We are talking, after all about strategizing the means to overthrow the Soviet communist regime, an action that many considered a *causus belli*. This just doesn’t seem likely. I have no argument with Corke’s general line that bureaucratic battles certainly did undermine the effort to devise coherent strategies to achieve U.S. objectives, I believe, however, that the international context played a role in generating these debates—in my book I point out how the shifting balance of power greatly influenced the tone and tenor of these operations. One example of where Corke runs into difficulty is the story of James MacCargar a foreign service officer serving in Hungary in 1946. Sent to Hungary as part of *Operation Safehaven* which was to uncover Nazi personnel and assets, MacCargar was approached to provide support for a Hungarians resistance forces who aspired to create an anti-Soviet underground. MacCargar sought guidance from Washington but received no responses to his queries; he took matters into his own hands and formed a network to keep Hungary independent but without the resources necessary to succeed. To Corke this demonstrates how policymakers in Washington sabotaged strategic opportunities in Eastern Europe. However, given the broader context, particularly the social, political, and economic collapse spreading through Europe with which the Truman Administration was forced to contend, it shouldn’t be surprising that Hungary would be off the radar screen. Simply put, in 1946-

1947 Washington was far more concerned with rolling back communist power and influence in key nations like France and Italy than in Eastern Europe.

Additionally Corke's contention that bureaucratic infighting prevented the creation of a coherent set of objectives gives the impression that had the United States arrived at a fully reasoned strategy it could have successfully achieved the destabilization of the Soviet bloc. While I am sure that Corke does not believe that is the case, her discussion leads one to think so and obscures much of what the bureaucratic battles were all about, which is just how to do you attack a police state of the likes of Stalinist Soviet Union? Many of the strategies that Corke believes to be contending Titoism (i.e., encouraging nationalist communist regimes independent of Moscow), rollback, liberation, etc. reflected the struggle to find a strategy that would allow the United States to break through the Iron Curtain.

Ultimately, the framework would be provided by State Department Counselor and renowned Soviet expert Charles Bohlen who contended that the foremost target for U.S. psychological warfare must be the Soviet security apparatus which had to be weakened to the point that it could not crush anti-Communist rebellions when they would eventually erupt. Thus the Soviet military, security services, and the Communist Party itself were the focus of significant U.S. covert operations which escalated as the Cold War intensified in 1950. The Korean War, Soviet atomic bomb detonation, and the approval of NSC 68 which called for the fomenting of unrest and revolution throughout the Soviet bloc brought this strategy to a head. As Corke argues CIA director Walter Bedell Smith warned that the objectives established in NSC 68 would require a massive increase in U.S. covert capabilities which could conflict with the CIA's traditional intelligence gathering missions. Furthermore, the magnitude of the operations would increase to the point that they could no longer remain covert. The question hanging over Bedell Smith's head was just how aggressive was the United States prepared to attack the Soviet bloc? All of these were important debates, and it is my belief that to understand them one needs to go beyond the confines of Washington DC.

As Corke demonstrates, many of the policy discussions of the late 1940s came to a head in the period between 1950 and 1952. How were the mandates issued by previous National Security Council directives such as NSC 68 and later NSC 68 to be achieved? What were the risks that the United States would be prepared to take? Here, Corke does a fine job detailing the bureaucratic battles with the State Department on the one hand and the Psychological Strategy Board on the other. The PSB was an interdepartmental agency created by President Truman in April of 1951 and charged with generating the psychological war plans to achieve U.S. objectives, it was also tasked with coordinating between the NSC, State Department, and the Defense Department. The State Department rejected the PSB's efforts to devise Cold War strategies insisting that these were policy questions which only they had the expertise in handling. The State Department won this debate and would assume control of the Strategic Concept Panel created to establish the strategy to achieve U.S. objectives.

Ultimately, the Panel concluded that the objectives of U.S. policy since 1948 could only be achieved through global war or the overthrow of the Soviet regime, neither of which was

feasible—and certainly global war was not desirable. They instead offered an interim strategy focused on continuing operations that would strain the communist power structure in Eastern Europe and the USSR until such time that the regime itself was weakened sufficiently so that a renewed covert offensive could instigate its collapse. Corke is highly critical of the State Department's role in wresting authority from the PSB, arguing that it led eventually to the dissolution of the organization itself. (135)

The scaling back of U.S. psychological warfare efforts coincided, ironically, with the onset of the 1952 Presidential campaign which featured the issue of “liberation” front and center. Dwight Eisenhower, foreign policy advisor John Foster Dulles, and running mate Senator Richard Nixon lambasted to great effect the Truman Administration for abandoning hundreds of millions of people to communist tyranny. Eisenhower's victory was supposed to presage a new era in U.S. covert activity but he too would reduce many of the original ambitions he brought to the White House in 1953. In yet another great irony, just as this draw-down commenced Eastern Europe was gripped in massive unrest, first in East Germany, then Czechoslovakia, followed by the potentially transformative Polish uprising, culminating in the disastrous Hungarian Revolution of November 1956 that spelled the end of the post-Stalinist liberalization in Eastern Europe (let alone the USSR). While the United States would continue efforts to “modify” the Soviet system and push for “evolutionary” rather than revolutionary change in the latter 1950s and 1960s, the hope that the Soviet bloc would quickly collapse and the cold war terminated faded from U.S. strategic thinking.

### *Conclusion*

My disagreements with the tenor of some of Corke's argumentation should not obscure the fact that she has prepared a very important book that all scholars of the early cold war era must consult—especially those that are interested in the intelligence bureaucracy where the literature is quite thin. It is my hope that Corke's publication will refocus attention on this important period of American history and open the floodgates for more work on this important topic.

First of all I would like to start by thanking the H-Diplo editors for selecting my book to be part of a roundtable.<sup>1</sup> The roundtables, and article reviews, are a wonderful venue, not only for forcing scholars to clarify their thinking but also for opening the floor to the larger epistemological, methodological, and historiographical discussions that are not possible in any other forum. Unfortunately, over the last decade these types of conversations have been largely absent from our scholarly journals and conferences. It is my sincere hope that they continue in this venue.

I would also like to thank Betty Dessants, Rhodri Jeffreys-Jones, Robert Jervis, Scott Lucas and Gregory Mitrovich for agreeing to take part in the review process. Over the years I have benefited a great deal from their work. Their comments, as I expected, were punctilious and thought provoking. I could not have asked for more.

Let me begin by iterating my epistemological and methodological approach. As Rhodri Jeffreys-Jones has pointed out, I consider myself a “postmodern” historian—one in training—but a postmodern historian nonetheless. As such, I was not so much interested in finding “the real story” of early American covert operations or in “advancing our understanding of” the Truman presidency. My goal was much more limited. I sought only to “construct an innovative and provocative argument that [would] stimulate debate on the methods used by scholars to historicize American national security strategy”.<sup>2</sup>

A secondary objective, and this I must confess could have been brought out more forcefully in the conclusion, was to highlight the dangers of American interventionism abroad. How American covert operations developed in the immediate post-war period and the consequences that resulted, illustrate all too well the problems inherent in these campaigns.

As a “post-modern” scholar I also wanted to suggest that “history” is indeed “a muddle.” Thus I attempted to construct a story that illustrated precisely this. My intention was to write an account “that accentuated the inconsistency and discontinuity of cold war strategy.” Yet in the process of doing so, according to Jeffreys-Jones, I exposed myself to the charge that I am the one “who is muddled.” This is because, he argues, “my penchant for ‘nuance’” has held me back from “crafting a coherent interpretation of the mass of administrative detail and bureaucratic maneuvering” that existed at time.

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<sup>1</sup> I would also like to thank Andrew Johnston and David Sutherland for agreeing to proof read and comment on my response. If there are any typos, grammatical mistakes, misplaced commas or inappropriate use of semi-colons, please blame them.

<sup>2</sup> Sarah-Jane Corke, *U.S. Covert Operations and Covert Operations: Truman, Secret Warfare and the CIA, 1945-1953*, London: Routledge, 2008, 8.

I have to wonder, however, just how much “coherency” he would have liked me to apply to a policy whose most interesting feature, at least as far as I am concerned, was its incoherency. As I have argued elsewhere, coherency is not always a good thing. Sometimes it further obscures our understanding of the past.<sup>3</sup> The story I was trying to tell lies precisely in the “nuances of the administrative detail and bureaucratic maneuvering” that took place during these years. To use another of Jeffreys-Jones’ analogies, in my history there was no forest, only scattered trees along a very barren landscape.

I should at this point note that I very much admire Jeffreys-Jones’s work even though we disagree in our epistemological and methodological approaches. I also think that this type of disagreement is a good thing: It is what makes our field so interesting and dynamic. In addition, I believe that there is a need for both “modern” and “postmodern” accounts of the past — and just so there is no confusion, I know I spelt postmodern with a hyphen above — I guess this makes me pro-choice.

Not surprisingly then, given our differences, Jeffreys-Jones and I also disagree on a number of historiographical questions. Most importantly perhaps, he believes that “Truman’s post war foreign policy goal [by goal I assume he simply means policy] was plain.” It was, he argues, “to prevent or slow down the expansion of international communism.” I would have preferred if he had told us where this language came from but for his purposes that appears to be neither here or there.

“Naturally,” he continues, the President, “allowed his officials to experiment and to debate the means [here I assume he means strategy] to be used. After all he was a professional politician and a pragmatist.” But, Jeffreys-Jones concludes, “flexibility is not the same as muddle.”

Yet, as I suggested above, in this case it was. It is one thing to “experiment” or debate strategic options; it is quite another to fail to resolve those disputes and abandon the “experiments” that were clearly not working, especially when those “experiments,” “clinical” or otherwise, were resulting in the death of a number of refugees.

Moreover, as a vast majority of those working in the administration complained at the time, they had no idea what Truman’s goal actually was. As John Sherman, a member of the Psychological Strategy Board argued at the time, it was not clear whether U.S. objectives were “to reduce Russian military power...or bring about a democratic regime...or overthrow the present government...or divorce the satellites...or keep the present regime in power, but with a changed attitude toward the rest of the world.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Sarah-Jane Corke, “History, Historians and the Naming of American Cold War Strategy: A Postmodern Reflection on Strategic Thinking in the Truman Administration,” *Intelligence and National Security*, 2001, 16:3: pp. 146-165.

<sup>4</sup> John Sherman, “National Policy and/or Strategy, Aims, Purposes, Objectives, Courses of Action and Programs, 31 October, 1951. HSTL PSB, Box 14, File 091.412 drafts.

Aside from the “muddle” problem, Jeffreys-Jones also writes that I have joined the “throng” of other historians of intelligence who have ignored the “historical context” of early covert operations. In this case, and in what I must confess to be a somewhat surprising move, he suggests that perhaps I should have started my story with a case of American “non-intervention in the internal affairs of other countries.” To his mind, President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s decision to sign a Western Hemispheric non-intervention policy at the Montevideo conference in 1933 was “an important historical precedent” that I should have taken into account.

If I understand him correctly, he seems to be arguing that the United States continued this policy of “non-interventionism” until the riots broke out in Bogota, Columbia. He believes that this event, which left Secretary of State George Marshall in a seemingly vulnerable position, was “the immediate stimulus, or at least the rational” for the adoption of covert operations.

Yet causation can be tricky. From a post-modern perspective I could argue that where one decides to start or end their story is arbitrary: It is a form of intervention. I made the decision to start my account with the legacy of the OSS precisely because I believe that the adoption of covert operations owed more to domestic factors than events abroad. Abroad, in this case, would include Latin America. My book ended — not concluded — as Scott Lucas correctly points out, during the first year of the Eisenhower administration for exactly the same reasons.

Theoretical baggage aside, none of the documents I looked at suggested that the situation in Columbia resulted in the adoption of “covert operations:” And here I think it is important to mention that language is important.

What the riots did do was give George Kennan an excuse to lobby for Admiral Roscoe Hillenkoeter’s removal as Director of Central Intelligence, but Kennan was already moving in this direction. Besides as a number of scholars have illustrated, “covert operations” as defined by Kennan were already going on well before 1948.

Finally, I must confess that, contrary to Jeffreys-Jones’ assertion, I see Roosevelt’s pledge at Montevideo as an anomaly in U.S.-Latin American relations, not as an “important historical precedent.” I base my beliefs on the persistent history of U.S. interventionism in these countries. To my mind, Montevideo was merely one of those strange blips in history that really have no meaning at all, aside of course, from its political uses. After all history is really nothing more than “politics by other means,” to paraphrase the master strategist himself.

Clearly, by now I have exposed my historiographical position. I am a “revisionist,” albeit a post-modern one. Not because I am a critic of American foreign policy, as Jeffreys-Jones suggests — although I often am — or an economic determinist — I am not a determinist of any kind (nor by the way, were/are the majority of “revisionists”) — but rather because the

assumptions that inspire “revisionism” best reflect how I see the world. I simply do not believe that external events define our actions. Rather I consider the reverse to be a closer approximation to how things seem to unfold, at least in my world. In my world, and in my histories, perception defines “reality”, not the other way around. And, to my mind domestic forces like ideology, culture, economics, politics, personality, and a host of other intangible factors define our perception. Of course, my “revisionist” stance is usually tempered by my postmodern epistemological and methodological approach. You can think of me as a Rortyan without the intellect or the certainty.

I will come back to this point later. Right now I want to move on to the comments made by Scott Lucas and Greg Mitrovich. In many ways both laid the groundwork for my study of early American covert operations. Indeed over the last decade both scholars read and offered substantial comments on various parts of the manuscript. I am indebted to them both. Of course this does not mean that we do not have substantial differences in opinion. We do, as you will see below.

I want to start with Greg Mitrovich, my friend the “realist:” Not, to quote Jerry Seinfeld, “that there is anything wrong with that.” I just think it is important that we all recognize our methodological positions. Mitrovich is a wonderful scholar but he and I see the world in fundamentally different ways.<sup>5</sup> Not surprisingly then we also disagree on a number of important historiographical questions. Given our differences, I have been looking forward to our conversation ever since he agreed to be one of the reviewers.

So let’s have some fun ...

In his opening salvo he challenges my argument on three fronts. I will deal with his first two points directly below and then come back to his third later in the review. First, he suggests that I apply “an almost conspiratorial tone” to my discussion of “containment” (these are my danger quotes not his). While I find his statement an interesting comment on the state of American political-culture, I do not feel that my suggestion that “containment” was more “morally acceptable” to the American people than “liberation,” falls into the category of conspiracy theory.

If one wants a good conspiracy theory they need only walk down the main drag of my campus where some nut has posted signs saying 9/11 was an inside job.

In terms of understanding why the term “containment” — a mythic characterization if there ever was one — was adopted, I do think it is important to explore the underlying assumptions behind the words we choose to employ. As I pointed out above, language is important: It has just taken us a while to fully understand this. Second, I only partially agree with his assertion that our failure to deconstruct (my word) “containment” earlier was directly the result of intellectual lethargy. I see it as primarily a failure to explore how

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<sup>5</sup> His book, *Undermining the Kremlin: American Strategy to Subvert the Soviet Bloc, 1947-1956*, New York: Cornell University Press, 2000, won the Stuart Bernath Book Award in 2001.

theory informs vocabulary: A failure that owes more to disciplinary blinders than anything else. O.K. perhaps there was a little laziness...

Mitrovich also suggests that I perhaps give John Lewis Gaddis too much credit for solidifying “containment” in our collective psyche. He points out that, other historians, even “revisionists,” have employed the term in the past. This is certainly the case. However, it does not negate the important role Gaddis played in propping up this misleading characterization of American Cold War strategy. I want to be clear here, I am not suggesting that Gaddis was involved in some broad intellectual plot to frame American policy in benign terms, although that is certainly what occurred. Rather, I believe Gaddis, like many of those before and after him— Mitrovich included—embraced “containment” because it reflected how he—and they—saw American foreign policy in the postwar world. For Gaddis, American policy was defensive.

To be fair Gaddis also did not have access to the documents that we have today. That said, despite the release of this new information, he still holds true to his original position. Indeed, in his most recent work he has gone well beyond the benevolent arguments he made in the 1970s and 1980s. As a friend reminded me recently, “the weighing of facts is...an ideological exercise, not an empirical one,” and Gaddis has certainly moved to the right.<sup>6</sup>

Despite his recent shift, today it is difficult to believe that any historian of the cold war is not aware of his decision to privilege the discourse of “containment”. Gaddis’ [hi]stories had an enormous impact on several generations of scholars. That his work came to define the field during these years was largely the result of his skills as a teacher, researcher and writer and because his arguments supported and reflected the intellectual climate in which he was publishing. In other words his work fit the national narrative that was prevalent at the time. Given the recent controversies, over his last three books, however, that appears to no longer hold true.

Prior to the release of his controversial article “The Tragedy of Cold War History”<sup>7</sup> I was one of those who believed his interpretation. Back in the day as I set about writing my first paper on the cold war at the University of Guelph, in Canada, I went to see my professor (who shall remain nameless), and asked him what books I should read on the topic. He immediately picked up *The United States and the Origins of the Cold War* and said, “start with Gaddis, but don’t read the revisionists, they are all wrong.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> I am as always indebted to Andrew M. Johnston for his wonderful insights. Despite having finished the Ph.D. a decade ago his thoughtful comments always remind me that I am still his student.

<sup>7</sup> John Lewis Gaddis, “The Tragedy of Cold War History.” *Diplomatic History*: 17:1 (January, 1993): pp. 1-16.

<sup>8</sup> John Lewis Gaddis, *The United States and the Origins of the Cold War, 1941-1947*. New York: Columbia University, 2000.

I am embarrassed to admit that I actually took his words to heart and did not read a single revisionist history until I went to graduate school. Yet even then Gaddis was still considered the leading scholar in the field; the historian we most wanted to emulate. For example, when I attended my first conference I was talking to a group of students about our favorite books. When *Strategies of Containment* came up one person referred to as “the bible.”<sup>9</sup> Now I know this is anecdotal evidence and that perhaps Gaddis only influenced students who attended university in Upper Canada, during the Reagan presidency (I mean the Mulroney years) but somehow I doubt it.

I should mention that I am not suggesting that there was a conspiracy among us Canadians, only that *Strategies of Containment* was and remains an excellent example of “modern” scholarship. I continue to use it in my classes today, along-side Walter LaFeber’s *American, Russia and the Cold War* and Bruce Cumings, “Revising Post-Revisionism: Or The Poverty of Theory in Diplomatic History.”<sup>10</sup> It took a while but I eventually came to realize that, contrary to my professor’s admonition, the “revisionists” were “not all wrong.”

While we are on the topic of “revisionists” it’s probably a good time to turn my attention to Scott Lucas’s review. Aside from being a radical, I mean a “revisionist” (a little “revisionist” humour, you have to be one to get it) he is one of the most prolific writers of my generation. I don’t know how he does it but I respect him enormously for it. Not surprisingly then in his review he laments, or perhaps he chastises me (I am not sure which) for taking so long in turning the dissertation into a book. He writes that had my book “appeared at the start of the decade, it would undoubtedly be at the forefront of work on the CIA and U.S. foreign policy.” However, given “the many years of research and development,” and there were many, many, many years, he concludes that “the challenge” I face today is, what is the significance of my revelations?

He makes a good point. There have been a number of books on U.S. covert operations published over the last decade; some even discuss the Truman administration. And I do wish I had completed the book earlier. Not, however, because I would have been ahead of everyone or because my book would have been more “significant,” but rather because it would have made my quest for tenure much less stressful.

Tenure aside, new books are released every day and each one of us must deal with the question Lucas raises. And I would suggest that in terms of “significance,” argument is more important than timing. So let’s talk about my argument. For those readers who have not read my book I argue that covert operations failed in part because the Truman

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<sup>9</sup> John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of American National Security Policy during the Cold War*, United States: Oxford, 2005.

<sup>10</sup> See, Bruce Cumings, “Revising Postrevisionism,’ or The Poverty of Theory in Diplomatic History.” *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 17, No. 4, (1993): 539-569.

Administration did not have a coherent strategy for waging the Cold War. I suggest that five factors contributed to the debacle that occurred.

First, I believe American national security policy was articulated in broad and ambiguous terms. Second, as a result, each department and agency could, and did, pursue its own strategy with little or no regard for a coordinated effort. Third the lack of strategic guidance was exacerbated by the failure of the National Security State to operate effectively. Fourth, I maintain that psychological warriors developed their own internally driven rationale for the expansion of covert operations. William Donovan's legacy was the penultimate factor at work during this period. The fifth and final factor that worked against a coherent Cold War strategy was the ineffectiveness of President Truman and his national security staff.

I believe the significance of my argument lies in my suggestion that because there was no coherent strategy for waging the cold war, the decision by historians to characterize strategy as either "containment," "liberation," "roll-back," "Titoism," "compellance" or the search for "preponderant power" misrepresents how American strategies unfolded during this period. In order to illustrate this I created a narrative that allowed for a multiplicity of "strategic visions"<sup>11</sup> while at the same time focusing on the inherent contradictions. My goal, therefore, was to construct a history that accentuated the inconsistency and discontinuity of U.S. cold war policy during these years. This entailed highlighting the different "strategic visions" that existed while resisting the tendency toward an over-reaching grand narrative.<sup>12</sup> It is here that I part paths with the "modern-revisionists;" if once could or should conceive of the evolution of the historiography in this manner.

Not surprisingly, given Lucas' "revisionist credentials," he does not concern himself with my decision to privilege domestic factors. Instead, he highlights two areas where he finds my argument wanting. The hypothesis that he finds the least convincing is my assertion that William Donovan's legacy was an important part of the operational culture of the CIA. I actually agree with him in that this is probably the weakest part of the book, at least in terms of providing documentary evidence. There is no smoking gun that explicitly links "Wild Bill's" operational philosophy to that followed by psychological warriors during the first years of the cold war. However, this does not mean the connection was not there. I believe their well-documented behavior suggests that they were indeed following the operational precedents set in place by the director of the OSS.

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<sup>11</sup> I owe a debt of gratitude to Bruce Cumings for introducing this term. See Bruce Cumings, *Origins of the Korean War*, Volume 2, New York: Cornell University, 2004.

<sup>12</sup> In constructing this argument I have relied on the arguments made by a number of "postmodernist" scholars. I am especially indebted to Bruce Cumings, Mark Poster, David Campbell and Keith Jenkins. See Mark Poster, *Cultural History and Postmodernity: Disciplinary Readings and Challenges*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1997; Keith Jenkins, *Why History: Ethics and Postmodernity*, London: Routledge, 1999 and David Campbell, *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994.

In his review, Lucas also calls me on the carpet for concentrating too heavily on George Kennan's role in the development of cold war strategy. I should note that I find his point interesting given his recent article in *Diplomatic History*, which looks specifically at this topic.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless in his review he suggests that "Kennan's later anointing by historians as the master strategist...should not obscure the reality that in mid-1948 he was a mid-level official in a new 'national security state' with new agencies and hundreds of often competing actors." To some extent I agree, not with the "reality" part, but that Kennan's role has been overemphasized in the past. Indeed by 1949 he had made himself almost irrelevant. However, in the spring and summer of 1948 he was at the apex of his power. Not only was he the author of the majority of policy papers written during this period, including both NSC 20/4 and NSC 10/2, he was responsible for overseeing covert operations. The important role he played during these months placed him at the nexus between policy and operations so to take him out of the story or even to downplay his role, which Lucas seems to be suggesting, would leave a huge gap in the narrative, a gap I believe some historians have overlooked.

On the subject of gaps, it seems to be a good time to segue into Betty Dessants' review. Dessants and I share a passion for bureaucratic history (I know, we all have our eccentricities). However, unlike Mitrovich the "realist" and Lucas the "revisionist," the first who believes that external factors define policy, the second who holds that domestic forces are more important in influencing a government's actions, she wants to straddle the divide. I imagine that she might refer to herself as a "post-revisionist," although there are enough holes in that linguistic artifice to drive a truck through....

Nevertheless, her argument is important for precisely this reason. She suggests that I should have explored additional internal and external factors in my book. Like Mitrovich she believes that I failed to give adequate attention to the "international context." She writes, "given the massive changes in European and Asian geopolitics along with the growth of the nuclear capabilities of both the U.S. and U.S.S.R. between 1945 and 1953, the Truman administration's vacillations in *policy* (my emphasis) may have resulted as much from world events as they did from bureaucratic politics and the machinery of the national security process."

It is an interesting point and not one that I am fully at odds with, despite my own methodological and historiographical position. For example, on page eight of my introduction I wrote that "[al]though external forces—or the Soviet threat—is argued by many scholars to be the defining feature in the development of American Cold War policy, when it comes to understanding the inability of the Truman administration to develop a coherent strategy, I believe...that internal factors...took precedence over geopolitical factors" (my emphasis). I went to on to note, "I am by no means suggesting that American strategy was developed in a vacuum. The American-Soviet rivalry did provide the context for shaping American Cold War policy. However, I believe that context is defined by

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<sup>13</sup> Scott Lucas and Kaeten Mistry, "Illusions of Coherency: George Kennan, U.S. Strategy and Political Warfare in the Cold War, 1946-1950. *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 33, No. 1, (2009), pp. 39-66.

perception—and perception owes more to intangible factors than any reality that may or may not exist.”

In order to illustrate this point I used the dramatically different “strategic visions” offered by George Kennan, John Paton Davies, Paul Nitze, and Charles Bohlen. I argued that their differences were not the result of their living in different worlds but rather it was how they perceived the world in which they all lived, that was different. As such, the changes that occurred in American strategy during these years were not the result of the Soviet explosion of the atomic bomb, or the so-called fall of China to the communists, or the outbreak of the Korean War. Rather, the shifts that occurred depended on whose voice was dominant at the time.

In a nod to revisionism Dessants then suggests that I also should have given more attention to the “the domestic politics of anti-Communism, accusations of espionage, and the activities of Senator Joseph McCarthy,” than I did. She notes that while I mention both, I do so only “to remind [my readers] of the political backdrop” to my argument. She is right: I should have given more attention to these forces.

Then again, given that the book already consists of 240 pages and its cost is well over the price of five good bottles of wine, I shudder to think what may have been if I had added anything else.

Still Dessants’s central point—and it was made in various ways by all of the reviewers — captures the central dilemma faced by the majority of historians writing today. Is American foreign policy, or its corresponding strategy, the result of internal or external factors, or some combination of both? I’ve made my case; I will leave it to you to make yours.

Before ending—not concluding—I want to extend my apologies to Roderick Bailey for misspelling his name and incorrectly citing the journal number in which his article appeared. The correct citation is “OSS-SOE Relations, Albania 1943-1944,” *Intelligence and National Security*, Vol. 15, No. 2., (Summer 2000), pp. 20-35.

In addition to my failure to correctly cite Bailey’s work, as Jeffreys-Jones and others have pointed out, there are additional spelling mistakes and typographical errors in the book. There is no excuse for this and I, of course, take full responsibility. In my own defence—just in case readers are still considering buying the book despite its hefty price tag, its postmodern methodology, its leftist leanings, its muddled prose, its questionable significance, and its conspiratorial tone—I did spell most of the words properly.

That said, given the mistakes that do appear, I have no choice but to accept Jeffreys-Jones’ admonition that in the future I should strive to be more “accurate” in my writing. In terms of his request that I should also try to be more objective, well by now you probably know how I feel about that nonsense .... And as for being more historical, I must confess I am not quite sure what he means, but I promise to try harder next time.

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