

# SUPPLEMENT

## DISCIPLES OR PUPILS ?

### Kennan, Bohlen and the Kelley program

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#### Introduction

In the mid-1920s Robert Francis Kelley, a tall and taciturn American diplomat in his early thirties and a leading authority in the State Department on the Soviet regime, took the lead in devising a program to train young foreign service officers in Russian language and culture. Although the traditional diplomat of this period was the generalist rather than the expert, Kelley had perceived the need for specialization in order to cope with the unique problems that the revolutionary Soviet regime posed to the United States (and the world). Beginning in 1927, he selected two young officers yearly for an intensive training in such faraway places as Paris, Berlin and Riga. Before the Great Depression brought on budgetary constraints that discontinued the program in 1934, seven experts on Russia had completed the curriculum. They became an influential group within the American diplomatic corps. Of all trainees, George Frost Kennan and Charles Eustis Bohlen were to remain for the longest time and most intimately associated with Soviet affairs, and their careers will receive particular attention in this essay.

Bohlen was wont to preside over a clamluch table in a small seafood café on the Washington waterfront on Saturdays, where he discussed vital diplomatic matters with other government officials. Members of the Soviet foreign service were frequently entertained at this place and here many of the policies affecting Russia were first roughly drafted. In 1945, as Assistant to the Secretary of State, Bohlen furthermore gained the distinction of having attended all the major wartime conferences from Tehran to Potsdam. As the author of the so called X-article in *Foreign Affairs* (1947) and the father of America's containment policy, his friend Kennan followed suit in reaching the spheres of influence. By 1949 both could be ranked in the select group of America's global planners.<sup>1</sup>

This assessment raises suppositions about the connection between, on the one hand, the contents of the Kelley training program and, on the other hand, the points of view espoused by Kennan and Bohlen when their influence was most pervasive. How did the training mold their perceptions of the Soviet

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1 George F. Eliot, Who really runs the world?, *The Survey*, no.85, (1949).

Union? And did these perceptions still govern their policy recommendations to presidents and secretaries at the beginning of the Cold War?

### Kelley and the training program

From 1923 to 1937, Robert F. Kelley was the personification of the Division of Eastern European Affairs -at the time better known as the Russian Division- and his supreme knowledge on the subject was rarely disputed within the State Department.<sup>2</sup> Kelley was anything but a sympathetic commentator of the unfledged Soviet regime and its energetic, brash leaders. He had been fascinated with Russian culture ever since his college days at Harvard, several years before the Russian revolution, and had later spent a year under the tutelage of Russian emigrés at the Paris School of Oriental Languages. Throughout the 1920s Kelley's Eastern European Division was an energetic defender of America's nonrecognition policy towards the Soviet Union. It viewed that the Bolshevik regime was only a temporary aberration in Russian history, that it was continuously balancing on the verge of collapse and that its collapse would be welcome.

However, as the decade proceeded and the Bolshevik government had steadily eliminated its most important competitors, Kelley saw himself faced with increasing preparedness in the American government to abandon the policy of isolating Russia. When in 1926 Alexandra Kollontai, the Soviet ambassador-designate to Mexico, commenced on a speaking tour through America to promote bilateral trade activity, Kelley unsuccessfully sought to block it. His efforts to turn the tide for recognition were further undercut in 1928, when the United States accepted Soviet ratification of the Kellogg-Briand pact.<sup>3</sup> Disturbed with the gradual change of opinion, Kelley came to feel the need to train a group of foreign service officers that could guard the nonrecognition policy and the values that supported it against the pressures for recognition and accommodation. In June 1927 his efforts to devise a program culminated in a set of 'Regulations Governing the Selection, Training, and Promotion of Foreign Service Officers for Language Assignment in the Near East, in Eastern Europe and in North Africa'. Participants in the program were required to serve an initial 18-month period of regular foreign service work in a respective region. In that period their suitability for further training as language officers would be assessed, primarily by judging their "stability of purpose and quality of mind". They would then be assigned to three years of academic study

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2 While presiding over his Division, Kelley had set up the richest collection of materials "on every aspect of Soviet life" in the United States; even Soviet foreign minister Maxim Litvinov, on a visit in America, was impressed with the abundance and had to admit it: the Division had better records on the history of Soviet diplomacy than his own foreign service. George F. Kennan, *Memoirs, 1925 - 1950* (New York 1983), 84.

3 Frederic L. Propas, Creating a hard line toward Russia: the training of State Department experts, 1927-1937, *Diplomatic History* 8 (1984) 209-226.

in their field. Finally, at the end of their formal training, the language officers would be entitled to assignments and advancement within their areas of specialization for at least ten years.

As soon as Kelley had won the approval for his program, he began to arrange for provisions that would make his 'boys' (as he would come to call them) into skillful and -as important- sceptical observers of the Soviet Union. He did not want them to concentrate their studies on current developments in the Soviet Union or on Marxist ideology. Instead Kelley stressed the importance of a solid background in Russian language and culture. He wanted the officers to obtain a college training equivalent to the one given the sons of nobility in Czarist Russia and to the one he had received himself in Paris. Kelley was not interested in the first place in educating accomplished political analysts, but rather sought to provide his officers with basic skills and values with which to pass a judgment on Soviet behavior.

Kelley's preparations were at least as careful as it concerned the political atmosphere and location of the program. American and British universities were to Kelley's taste too sympathetic towards the Soviet experiment; besides, they were not as advanced in Russian studies as some universities on the European continent. The renowned Economic Cabinet in Prague eventually dropped out because its faculty studied the emerging Soviet state with a degree of detachment and hopeful expectation. Kelley's preference went to Berlin or Paris. Their schools offered renowned curricula and were furthermore populated by Russian emigrés who shared Kelley's contempt for the Bolshevik regime and his nostalgic desire for Czarist Russia. All but one of the language officers eventually attended the School of Oriental Languages in Paris. Kennan, whose command of the German language was stronger, was sent to Berlin.

### **Kennan and Bohlen as trainees**

In the summer of 1928 Kennan was the first of officers to be admitted to Kelley's program; more than five years of training would follow, during which he established himself as one of Kelley's 'bright boys'. His first training assignments were to the American diplomatic missions in Tallinn (Estonia) and Riga (Latvia), constituting the probationary period in the field that was required in the regulations. In these days the independent countries of the Baltic littoral - Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania- were outposts of Western civilization on the border of the Bolshevik empire, whose populations were very much aware of the threat of having such a powerful and unpredictable neighbor.

Living in the Baltic truly resembled living in the old Russia. Many fugitives from Bolshevik terror had fled to its tolerant cities. Together with other unmarried young men, Kennan inhabited an apartment on the top floor of a huge German-style building in Riga. "Over the long rainy weekends, arguments about Russia, Marxism, capitalism, the peasant problem, etc., droned endlessly on, rising and falling with the hours", as he recalls the atmosphere. "Participants

arrived, added their words and departed again, like casual players in a roulette game".<sup>4</sup> Kennan enjoyed his time in the Baltics. He travelled extensively through the countryside, or spent weekends in the Russian-type dachas along the seashore; in the meantime he picked up an enduring love for the Russian language and its literature.

In the late summer of 1929 Kennan departed for Berlin to register for the *Seminar für Orientalische Sprachen*. From private tutors, for the most part "highly cultured Russian emigrés", he acquired a background not dissimilar to that of a "well-educated Russian of the old prerevolutionary school".<sup>5</sup> In the autumn of 1931 Kennan was assigned to the Russian Section of the American legation in Riga. After two years Kennan had become bored with studying and wanted to get back to practical service. Kelley allowed him to skip the normal third year of study, as he would later do with all trainees. In the absence of an embassy in Moscow, diplomats at the Section had regularly supplied Washington with reports on the Soviet Union and it had virtually matured into a scholarly institution which, at least in the view of Kennan, could be equaled with few other places outside the Soviet Union. His own particular responsibility during the two years of his Riga assignment was to report on the economic situation in the Soviet Union.

At the end of his training, Kennan emerged as a hostile observer of the Soviet Union, believing that the communist doctrine inevitably led to Soviet aggressivity toward other nations and that normalcy therefore could never be a feature of American-Soviet relations. In 1931, for instance, when still a student in Berlin, he argued that:

[...] the present system of Soviet Russia is unalterably opposed to our traditional system, that there can be no possible middle ground or compromise between the two, that any attempts to find such a middle ground, by the resumption of diplomatic relations or otherwise, are bound to be unsuccessful, that the two systems cannot even exist together in the same world unless an economic cordon is put around one or the other of them, and that within twenty or thirty years either Russia will be capitalist or we shall become communist.<sup>6</sup>

As a true product of his training, Kennan also argued against recognition when the issue was reexamined by the Roosevelt Administration in 1932. He shared the pessimism of most men at the Riga legation about the benefits to be gained with establishing diplomatic relations. Proponents of recognition claimed that the establishment of relations with the Soviet Union would open greener pastures for American business which was troubled by the most severe economic crisis of the century. Their arguments inspired Kennan to initiate what he calls his "first personal brush with the American policy-making process". He

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4 George F. Kennan, *Memoirs 1925-1950*, 30.

5 Ibidem, 33.

6 Letter, George F. Kennan to Walt Ferris, January 12, 1931; as quoted in Anders Stephanson, *Kennan and the art of foreign policy* (Cambridge 1989) 7.

brought to Washington's attention that previous experience showed that treaties with the Soviet government didn't provide real protection to the interests of other governments. The Bolshevik regime acts as it pleases, irrespective of formal agreements with other nations. Moreover there was not likely to exist any connection between recognition and increased trade. The poor Russian market promised only very limited chances for the development of substantial trade relations. There was yet another aspect to his argument. Close trade relations could be used -and were likely to be used- by Soviet leaders as an instrument to manipulate the United States. Any form of dependency on Russia should be avoided at all costs, Kennan believed. His efforts were in vain, but they clearly showed his inclinations. The recognition in 1933 did, however, have an immediate twist for Kennan personally. In December 1933 he was assigned as an aide to the first American ambassador to Moscow, William C. Bullitt. Among the friends he would make at the embassy was Charles Bohlen, with whom we will concern ourselves now.

Bohlen had entered the foreign service in 1929, as a 25-year old graduate from Harvard, and was in the third and last group of two selected for the program. He had first been sent as vice-consul to Prague, where his duties were so light that he had ample time to enjoy the bustling life of the Czechoslovakian capital. In September 1931 Bohlen began his studies at the *School of Oriental Languages* in Paris. Like Kennan in Berlin, he also had a flavor of the local Russian emigré culture and would similarly conceive a love for the Russian language. The curriculum was of the *Ecole* was difficult, "but interesting and enjoyable". Most trainees had to engage private tutors. Besides classroom instructions in Russian, they attended lectures on Marxism and Russian history and studied these subjects in "almost all anti-communist" books.<sup>7</sup> Yet the emphasis of the curriculum undeniably lay on Russian language and literature. This excited some critical comments from the trainees. However, Kelley wanted it to be that way. He was wary to expose his language officers to the actuality of the Soviet experiment, perhaps afraid that the rethoric of the Soviets would seduce the young men to switch their sympathies.

Bohlen passed the summers of 1932 and 1933 in a little Russian pension in Narva Joesu, a former Russian resort on the coast of Estonia. The pension was run by two fervently anti-Bolshevik sisters, who had been driven from St. Petersburg during the 1917 revolution. "Life in the Serebryakova sisters' pension", Bohlen wrote as he conjured up the memories of a peaceful, classic atmosphere, "undoubtedly followed the centuries-old style of the leisure class of Czarist Russia".<sup>8</sup> These summers provided Bohlen with a fluency in Russian which, later in his career, gained him the reputation of speaking Russian like a Moscovite. He had been one of the most promising students of the group. Shortly after he completed his studies in Paris, in 1933, he was invited by

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7 Charles E. Bohlen, *Witness to history, 1929-1969* (New York 1973) 10.

8 Bohlen, *Witness*, 10.





De Grote Drie en hun ministers van Buitenlandse Zaken (Eden, Stettinius en Molotov) in Yalta. Bohlen staat links achter Churchill. Uit: C.E. Bohlen, *Witness to history 1929-1969* (New York 1973).

ambassador Bullitt to join his staff at the Moscow embassy. Bohlen was no exception to the rule that the language officers held anti-Soviet views when they left the training. He had been ignorant, unbiased and even disinterested in Soviet affairs when he entered the program. From the beginning Bohlen was trained to be leery of Soviet Russia.

### **The Stalinist 1930's**

Kennan and Bohlen since their first assignments to Moscow frequently had to cope with the Stalinist regime, crossing an era in which Soviet behavior caused profound confusion in the Western world on how that nation should be viewed. Impelled by the increasing fascist threat in Europe and Japan's expansionism in the Pacific, President Roosevelt and many of his advisers, including his confidante Harry Hopkins and the new ambassador to the Soviet Union, Joseph Davies, envisaged a new era in relations with the Kremlin. Kelley, whose stubborn anti-Soviet attitude was seen in the White House as an impediment to improved relations, was one of the first victims of this change in policies. As a result of some bureaucratic powerplay, the Division was reduced overnight in 1937 and Kelley was packed off as counselor to Ankara, in Turkey, where he would serve until his departure from the foreign service in 1945. Both Kennan and Bohlen, who criticized the measures as pro-Soviet and suspected that the Russians themselves had taken part in the campaign against Kelley, would however remain involved in Russian affairs and through their various capacities were left to deal with Stalin's regime.

In general, the American public perception during this period oscillated between at least three powerful images of the Soviet Union. The first image - that of the Soviet Union as an ideal state- was afflicted with admiration for the Soviet experiment. Particularly among intellectuals there was an idea that the Soviet experiment was the key to many problems of the West. Their sympathy was only reinforced when the Soviet Union appeared the only power to side against the fascists in the Spanish civil war. The second image -that of the Soviet Union as a brutal state- steadily gained adherents after 1935. It emerged from the notion that the purges and the increasingly xenophobic behavior of the Soviet regime could only point to a bloodthirsty totalitarian regime. The third image -that of the Soviet Union as a courageous ally- stemmed from a shared dedication to fight with all means the fascist demiurg. It praised the Russian people for its heroic resistance to the German invasion and it appreciated the Soviet Union as an actual and potential cooperative power.

Kennan and Bohlen regarded the admirers of the Soviet Union as naive dreamers whose sympathy was based on misinformation and incomplete analyses of Soviet life. The Russian experts at the Moscow embassy took pride in refuting Soviet economic propaganda in lengthy memoranda. They acknowledged the rapid expansion of Soviet heavy industry under the first and second Five Year Plans, but they also noted that consumer goods fell far behind and the

expansion was only made possible by sucking the life out of agriculture. Once a woman from California on visit in Moscow, who clearly was a sympathetic observer of the Soviet regime, expressed her dissatisfaction with their attitude:

I just don't see how young men can live over here in the midst of all this and not be infected by it, how you can see it all with your own eyes and not be thrilled at what a great experiment it all is, how you can fail to want to participate in it yourselves.<sup>9</sup>

They could not be infected, for this sort of enthusiasm their backgrounds had rendered them immune.

The Russia that Kennan and Bohlen encountered in the 1930s left them much more susceptible to the image of the Soviet Union as a brutal police state. Late in the afternoon of December 1, 1934, a young communist had assassinated Sergei Kirov, the popular leader of the Communist Party in Leningrad. The Kirov incident unleashed a convulsive orgy of human sacrifice that would darken Russian skies for years. The extent and ferocity of the purges horrified all those at the Moscow embassy. The reign of terror even touched the personal lives of foreign diplomats. Contacts with Russian friends were no longer allowed. Citizens who tried to contact them were arrested, imprisoned, or killed as enemies of state. Diplomats were frequently portrayed to the public as foreign spies. At the same time it became increasingly difficult to meet with government officials. They were isolated from the people as well as from Soviet decision makers. For the American diplomats, too, life in the Soviet Union had become harder.

Kennan and Bohlen were close spectators and stood bewildered at Stalin's malevolent disregard for life. As Kennan tried to collect his experiences in his *Memoirs*: "To be forced to follow their [Soviet leaders'] course, day by day, and to write analytical dispatches about the entire process, was unavoidably a sort of liberal education in the horrors of Stalinism". The purges also hardened Bohlen's views.<sup>10</sup> Yet even though the ferocity of the purges had surprised them, they were not exactly disillusioned. Their education as foreign service officers had kept them from harboring any illusion on the nature of the Soviet state, or as Kennan much later analyzed in his *Memoirs*:

Distaste for the Stalin regime did not come by way of disillusionment of an earlier enthusiasm. Unlike many others who became professional observers of the development of Soviet power, I had never gone through a 'Marxist period'. [...] The reason, I suppose, lay partly in the fact that it was in the Baltic states that I grew a mature interest in Russian affairs.<sup>11</sup>

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9 Kennan's Manuscript, Part I, 19-20; as quoted in David Mayers, *George Kennan and the dilemma's of US foreign policy* (New York 1988) 43.

10 Kennan, *Memoirs*, 67; Bohlen, *Witness*, 54.

11 Kennan, *Memoirs*, 68.



Still, if the episode was not changing their sympathies, it had its inevitable impact. In their struggle to understand, their perceptions of the Soviet Union were being slightly transformed.

As they watched the spread of the purges, Kennan and Bohlen related it to other aspects of the Soviet state and their own general views about it. The confrontation with Stalinist terror had led them to reconsider the role of ideology in Soviet policies. Their keen appreciation of Stalin's preoccupation with power and control became increasingly crucial to their analyses of his regime. Their training as Russian experts had taught them that most Soviet actions were rooted in communist doctrines. The purges, however, seemed to them a conservative retreat from the idea that ideology determined Russian policies. As it turned out, Kennan and Bohlen differed on the degree to which ideology still mattered in the minds of Soviet leaders.

From the mid-1930s Kennan increasingly came to think of communist ideology as irrelevant among the forces that animated the Kremlin. Would-be proponents of Marxist policies had perished in the *Great Purges*. Lenin's ideology, once the guideline for human salvation, was now at the service of a state preoccupied with power "pure and simple". Its tenets were, as he stated in 1936, "[...] like cardboard rocks and wire mesh trees of stage scenery -the closer one approaches them, the more ridiculous and implausible they become".<sup>12</sup> *In lieu* he came to believe that the behavior of Soviet leaders could better be explained from Russian history. He perceived a return to the old Muscovy and the non-Western path, to times even far prior to the enlightened czardom of the late-nineteenth century:

Again we have the capital back in Moscow, and Petersburg is sinking back into the swamps out of which it was erected... We have again an oriental holding court in the barbaric splendor of the Moscow Kremlin [Stalin was from Georgia]. Again we have the same Byzantine qualities in Russian politics, the same intolerance, the same dark cruelty, the same religious dogmatism in word and form, the same servility, the same lack of official dignity, the same all-out quality of all of official life. Finally we have the same fear and distrust of the outside world.<sup>13</sup>

The Russian past was dominated by war or by preparation for war, and by the continent's merciless balance of power. The Russians had endured centuries of invasions from either Europe or Asia, thus coming to perceive any foreigner as at least a potential enemy. In Kennan's view, the Soviet leaders behaved just in line with Russian history as their outlook was afflicted with neurosis and a 'sense of insecurity'. American liberals and progressives, he admonished, must not be deluded by Bolshevik propaganda which portrayed Stalin as a modern

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12 Thomas R. Maddux, American diplomats and the Soviet experiment: the view from the Moscow embassy, 1934-1939, *South Atlantic Quarterly* (1975) 485.

13 Kennan, Address in Bad Nauheim, 1941-1942, GFK Papers; as quoted in Stephanson, *Kennan and the art of foreign policy*, 14.

'Prince of Peace'. Soviet goals were not defensive, rather they were becoming increasingly imperialistic.

It is not surprising that Kennan's prospects for Soviet-American relations were very somber; history just stood in the way of friendly relations. The United States had known peace for most of its past and tended to view foreign relations as a primarily peaceful enterprise. The Soviet perception of the world as a threatening environment inhibited a close understanding and the development of mutual sympathy. Kennan's recommendations to the State Department on how to cope with the Kremlin therefore stressed firmness and cohesiveness: "It is only the distribution of force which determines the Soviet attitude toward world affairs; and the world may as well reckon with the fact that the character of Soviet policy will vary in exact relationship to the actual force which Soviet leaders feel they can exert in international affairs. An increase in the strength of the country will invariably lead to increased arrogance and aggressiveness".<sup>14</sup> These themes developed in his mind in the 1930s. They would recur in virtually all his major analyses of the Soviet Union until after the war -including the 'long telegram'.

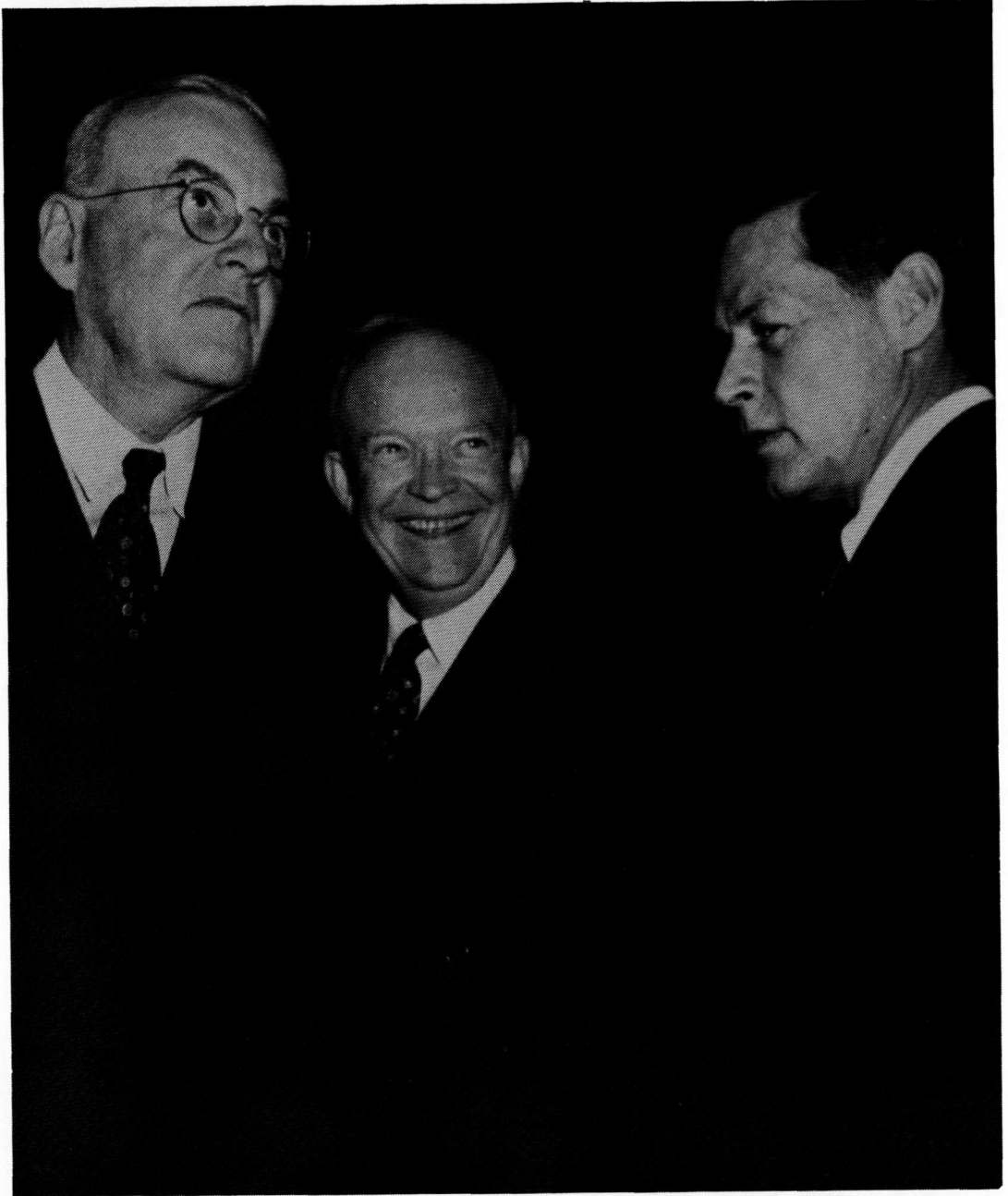
To Bohlen, as to Kennan, events underlined the predominance of power considerations over ideological considerations in the Stalinist regime. He asserted that Stalin initiated the purges mainly to prevent deteriorating economic conditions (despite the Five Year plans) from undermining his position. In the process the Soviet dictator effectively stirred up the traditional myth in Russia that it was surrounded and intruded by enemies. However, Bohlen considered it too early to concede the demise of ideology. In his messages to the State Department (as in his only book, *The transformation of American foreign policy*), Bohlen made an important distinction between Russian nationalism and Soviet nationalism. Russian nationalism was the product of a violent past, not unlike Kennan had described, and guided by the behavior of Russian czars. Soviet nationalism had many of the same features, such as an intrinsically imperialistic drive, but also had its broader ideological implications. Because it was the basis of their personal power, the leaders in the Kremlin were preoccupied with the survival of the system and its underlying principles. Ideology had pervaded their thinking and behavior, it also affected their interpretations of the West. Thus in assessing the nature of Soviet actions, Bohlen believed, the doctrines of communism should be considered.<sup>15</sup>

Kennan and Bohlen thus differed on the ideological quality of Soviet behavior, a difference that is interesting to note, although their prospects for Soviet-American relations remained equally dim. The Hitler-Stalin pact was to them new prove that the Soviet regime was dangerously unreliable and would

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14 George Kennan to Secretary of State, March 19, 1936; as quoted in Stephanson, *Kennan and the art of foreign policy*, 17.

15 Michael Ruddy, *The cautious diplomat: Charles E. Bohlen and the Soviet Union, 1929-1969* (Kent Ohio 1986); Charles E. Bohlen, *The transformation of American foreign policy* (New York 1969) 104-105.



Minister Dulles, president Eisenhower en Bohlen, na diens benoeming tot ambassadeur in de USSR, 1953. Uit: C.E. Bohlen, *Witness to history 1929-1969* (New York 1973).

determine its future independent of its treaty obligations. The general tendency in both their recommendations was: do not base any policy on the word of the Kremlin, however solemnly pledged. They both argued that Washington should take notion of the fact that concessions mean little to the Soviets. If anything they diminished one's status and prestige in Moscow's eyes. Whatever the differences on the motivating forces behind Soviet actions, their judgment of the implications for the United States was still unanimous. However, the war would cause a second waning in their personal consensus. This time it would not involve the relative weight of ideology in Soviet policy, but the right American policy. And whereas in the 1930s it was particularly Kennan who deviated from the bequests of Kelley's program, this time it would be Bohlen.

### The years of the *Grand Alliance*

Throughout the duration of the *Grand Alliance*, from 1941 to 1945, Kennan could not rid himself of his negative disposition about the future of Soviet-American relations. In his eyes the conditions for lasting cooperation were still absent and the American government should better prepare itself and its citizens for a serious cooling off in relations with Moscow after the war. He had even contended, in 1941, that it would have been better if Germany had not attacked the Soviet Union since "...not only did this create the possibility of Russian control of central and eastern Europe, but it also meant that the Soviets would be our allies".<sup>16</sup> Kennan feared that Washington might extend moral support to Russia while the Kremlin was still impervious to the idea of friendly relations. Russia may be an ally at the moment, he firmly believed it could certainly never be a friend. Having attempted to purchase security by its agreement with Germany, it deserved little sympathy from the West for playing "a lone hand in a dangerous game." For that, he coldly stated, Russia "must now take alone the consequences".<sup>17</sup>

Kennan spent the war mostly thinking up strategies to cope with the Soviet Union as a hostile power. As early as the summer of 1942, Kennan wrote that it was up to the United States to determine to what extent it should permit the Soviet Union to expand in eastern and central Europe. Washington should draw the line. Only if this were done, Kennan argued, a moderate level of collaboration on the longer run between the Soviet Union and the West might eventually be possible. But the winds blew from a different corner in Washington, at the least for the moment. In retrospect on the war years from 1945, Kennan concluded that the United States had failed to set the limits. In a letter to Bohlen, on the eve of the latter's departure to the *Yalta conference*, he wrote:

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16 Stephanson, *Kennan and the art of foreign policy*, 21.

17 Kennan, *Memoirs*, 133-134.

We have consistently refused to make clear what our interests and our wishes were in eastern and central Europe. We have refused to face political issues and have forced others to face them without us. We have advanced no positive, constructive program for the continent: nothing that would encourage our friends, nothing that could appeal to people on the enemy's side of the line.<sup>18</sup>

Kennan's cynism had undoubtedly been reinforced by his banishment from the mainstream of foreign policy making in the wartime years. Bohlen's pessimism, in contrast, seemed to be tempered by an involvement with White House policy. Although he did not dismiss his serious doubts on the future of relations with the Soviet Union, not even for the duration of the war alliance,<sup>19</sup> his position of adviser led him also to appreciate the White House perspective of enduring cooperation. The need to address the exigencies of war, Bohlen understood, simply demanded cooperation with the Soviet Union. At no time during the war, he argued later, could the United States have acted any differently. The mounting success of the alliance also caused him to mute his pessimism about postwar cooperation. The difference with Kennan became clearly visible in the earlier quoted correspondence of January 1945. Where Kennan had denounced the failure of American war diplomacy, argued that the United States should accept the division of Europe in two spheres and that it should not erect a policy on the illusion of postwar cooperation, Bohlen replied that Kennan's proposal was good in the abstract but as a practical suggestion utterly unrealistic. The political climate was not conducive to such a maneuver. Bohlen believed that it was too early to give up efforts to prolong cooperation until after the war:

Isn't it a question of realities and not bits of paper? Either our pals intend to limit themselves or they don't. I submit [...] that the answer is not yet clear. But what is clear is that the Soyuz is here to stay, as one of the major factors in the world. Quarreling with them would be too easy, but we can always come to that.<sup>20</sup>

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18 George F. Kennan to Bohlen, January 26, 1945, GFK Papers, box 28; as quoted in Stephanson, *Kennan and the art of foreign policy*, 38.

19 At the Moscow conference of 1943 he talked to Soviet negotiator Andrei Vishinsky, who had acted as a prosecutor in the third public trial in 1938 -the one Bohlen had attended. Vishinsky told Bohlen that the Soviet government had no interest in any territory beyond the Soviet borders and that there was no real obstacle to the closest kind of cooperation after the war. Bohlen responded with scepticism and disbelief: "With my background and knowledge, and knowing Vishinsky's past, I thought his words did not ring true". Bohlen, *Witness*, 131.

20 Mayers, *George Kennan and the dilemmas of US foreign policy*, 94-96; Ruddy, *The cautious diplomat*, 32-33.



### Conclusions: disciples or pupils?

In conclusion, Bohlen as well as Kennan developed their theoretical conceptions concerning American-Soviet relations ever since they left the language program in the early 1930s. First of all, they increasingly -although in different degrees- downplayed ideology as the motivating force behind Soviet policies; Soviet leaders were preoccupied with power rather than with promoting Marxist dreams. Secondly, international realities had forced them to leave the trenches of the nonrecognitionist period. Roosevelt had recognized the Soviet Union in 1933 and directed the United States eight years later into an alliance with Moscow. As a consequence, American diplomats were increasingly charged with the responsibility to sit down and confer with their Soviet counterparts. They could no longer take a mere spectatorial stance. Soviet-American relations had changed from a future threat to a current reality, one to which Kennan and Bohlen had no choice but to adapt. To a greater degree, perhaps, than Kelley intended they thus became flexible policy analysts.

In the process they tended to diverge in their judgments on the relative weight of Marxist ideology and on the wisest attitude toward the Soviet ally. These differences resulted partly from experiences within the government. A closer look at their respective personalities also offers clues to their disagreements. Kennan was a sensitive and introspective intellectual who mulled over his every thought; his philosophical loneliness and his black despair of the future recur in his writings and interviews with remarkable frequency. Already in 1933 his superiors in Riga had noticed in the young diplomat a tendency "to entertain intellectual concepts rather emotionally, and to be a trifle more enthusiastically idealistic or more hopelessly cynical".<sup>21</sup> Bohlen, on the contrary, was more of a doer instead of a thinker. He believed in the efficacy of the diplomatic process, particularly in personal diplomacy; he was better able to adapt to given situations than Kennan. The scepticism he displayed in his analyses was nicely attuned to the realities of the immediate moment. He was by nature an optimist and a pragmatist.

In summary, there are the disagreements and divergencies. But they should not be exaggerated. In fact, resemblance rather than divergence is the more striking feature in the ideas of Kennan and Bohlen as compared to each other as well as to the tenets of Kelley's training program. For instance, in Bohlen's view Kennan's error in supporting the spheres of influence was mainly his timing. The Soviet Union had not yet shown that it would resist cooperation. When Roosevelt, Stalin, and Churchill had met for the last time at Yalta and political differences would assume major proportions, Bohlen's second thoughts would be confirmed. It would push him closer to Kennan, accepting the spheres

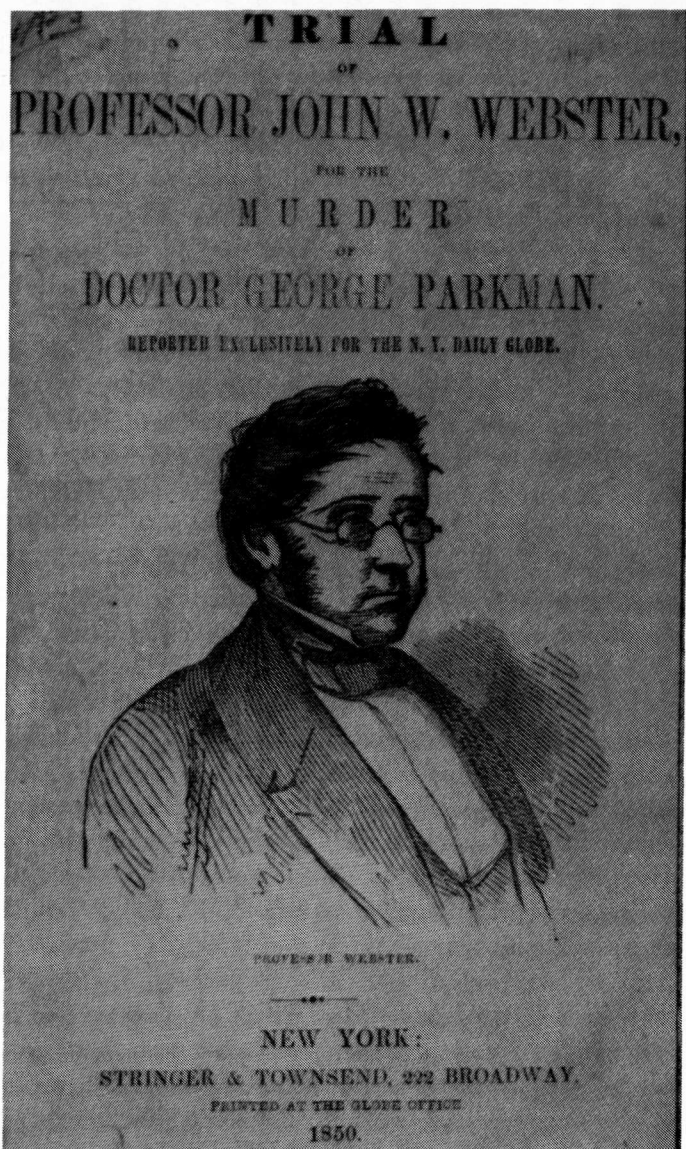
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21 Maddux, *American relations with the Soviet Union, 1933-1941*, Ph.D. dissertation University of Michigan (1969) 138.

of influence. On the other hand it is important to note that Kennan never ruled out some level of cooperation. The prerequisite was only that the United States should take it upon itself to define the limits of Soviet power. At his turn, Kennan moved somewhat to Bohlen's position when Stalin in a speech in February 1946 stated that Russia was still committed to communism. His *long telegram* and the *X-article* treated the Soviet Union much more as a power motivated by a crusading ideology than had his wartime analyses.

The personal disagreements between Kennan and Bohlen were to an important extent only a matter of nuance and temperament. Under Kelley the language officers were trained to perceive the Soviet Union in rigid terms that left little room for accommodation. Consequently, they opposed in various degrees Roosevelt's accommodating strategies before and during the second world war. Tactically their recommendations were of publicly 'getting tough' with the Russians. But more important is that behind these recommendations a conviction was sheltered that the United States and the Soviet Union represented two separate and hostile centers of power in the world. Continuation of a mutually expedient wartime alliance no longer took precedence over their counsels; instead, they argued that the inherently adversarial relationship between the Soviet Union and the West should be made the public basis of American foreign policy.

By the time they reached positions of influence, the imprints of their training were still visible. However, to view them as programmed opponents of the Soviets would be to overlook their intellectual capacities and the manifold experiences they had had since they left Kelley's training program. They certainly were identifiable pupils of their teacher; nevertheless, Kennan and Bohlen cannot be seen as preordained disciples of a guru.



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