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## George F. Kennan: An American Life

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deal with—war, strategy, and military operations. It would also make performance at staff and war colleges play a major role in selection for command positions. Above all, it would mean drastic changes in the Army's personnel system, and to the personnel systems of the other services as well. Had Ricks been willing to wrestle with these issues, he would have written a very different book.

Perhaps the most depressing aspect of the landscape of the current American military has been the return to a moral calculus that is nothing short of a return to the sexual standards of the Victorian age. Over the past several months we have seen the president of the United States remove a highly respected retired general, to whom the country owes much for his having turned around the situation in Iraq, from the directorship of the CIA for having an affair. At the same time the generals who botched up the war in Iraq were, as Ricks notes in a number of cases, not fired. Moreover, in one case, in a sad repetition of Westmoreland's promotion to become the Army's chief of staff after his disastrous tenure in Vietnam, a general whose performance was hardly more impressive was removed from command in Iraq and promoted to the position of the Army's chief of staff.

At present, it would seem that media and politicians would prefer standards for military leaders that emphasize "moral" behavior rather than competence in the profession—standards that few have followed. In a world where competence in any profession is an extraordinarily rare commodity, and especially competence in the military, this is indeed a dangerous precedent. The message emanating from Washington would appear to be that our leaders

prefer military leaders who are simple (at least in their sexual mores) to competent generals and admirals. In the end, those at the sharp end will pay a terrible price for such imbecility.

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Gaddis, John Lewis. *George F. Kennan: An American Life*. New York: Penguin, 2011. 784pp. \$39.95

Winner of the Pulitzer Prize for Biography in 2012, as well as a number of other awards, John Lewis Gaddis's study of George F. Kennan (1904–2005) has already firmly established itself as the fundamental scholarly biography for the Cold War period in American history. Gaddis began work on this biography in 1981, not long after he had spent a two-year period as visiting professor of strategy and policy at the Naval War College. At Newport in those days, he was already admired for his first book, *The United States and the Origins of the Cold War, 1941–1947* (Columbia Univ. Press, 1972), and for the exemplary quality of his teaching, which won him a Department of the Navy Meritorious Civilian Service Award at the Naval War College.

It was his first book and subsequent articles that brought Gaddis to Kennan's attention and led him to choose Gaddis as his authorized biographer. In giving Gaddis unrestricted access to what would eventually become 330 boxes of Kennan's diaries and papers at Princeton University's Seeley G. Mudd Manuscript Library, as well as giving him regular interviews, Kennan stipulated that the biography would not be published during his lifetime and so ensured that it would be a long-maturing project.

As the author relates in his foreword, Kennan was apologetic that he lived for another twenty-five years, thereby delaying Gaddis's work for as many years. While this did run the risk that the subject might outlive the author and all would have been in vain, the end result proves the merit of the plan. It is often said that the best biographies are those written by mature scholars who have developed not only a wider and deeper perspective on the contexts of their subjects' lives, but also have their own life experiences to help them understand more sensitively those of others. So it is with John Gaddis's life of George Kennan. Yet Gaddis's book was not a finished and preapproved manuscript that merely waited the death of the subject to see the light of day. It would take Gaddis six and a half years after Kennan's death to complete the work. In doing so, Gaddis leaned neither on Kennan's own published memoirs nor on the fourteen earlier studies of Kennan by other scholars. Instead, he used his own deep knowledge of the man and the Cold War era and his broad understanding of grand strategy to provide a brilliant and independent scholarly assessment that is entirely Gaddis's own. George Kennan is most widely remembered for the article that appeared in *Foreign Affairs* journal in July 1947 titled "The Sources of Soviet Conduct." The pen name used for the article, "X," only very briefly obscured his identity as its author. This article elaborated on Kennan's "long telegram" that he, as acting head of the U.S. diplomatic mission in Moscow, had written to the Treasury Department in February 1946. Kennan's telegram responded to the Treasury Department's bewilderment that the Soviet Union had failed to join the World

Bank and the International Monetary Fund after having participated actively in the Bretton Woods conference that created them both. Taken together, these two writings provided the intellectual foundation for the subsequent American grand strategic response to the Soviet challenge during the Cold War.

With these two pieces of writing, Kennan's analytical and writing skills reached their epitome of effectiveness and fame. Behind them, as John Gaddis reveals, Kennan was a strange and rather unpleasant man. To the reader, Kennan seems to have been some kind of misanthropic malcontent. A man of some considerable intellectual capacity, he was a notably egocentric, broody, dissatisfied, gloomy, and dismal soul. Gaddis shows that his misanthropic tendencies arose from a largely imagined unhappy childhood caused by his mother's early death. Born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, he was sent as a teenager to St. John's Military Academy, where the staff discouraged the loner from pursuing a further military career. His intellectual capacity won him entrance at Princeton University, where he thought himself a Midwesterner out of place among the eastern elite. On graduating from Princeton in 1925, he decided to enter the Foreign Service, not knowing what else to do. As a junior Foreign Service officer, he found it interesting to be abroad in foreign cultures, but the Service, itself, dissatisfying.

Despite his attitudes toward the Foreign Service, he did show significant organizational skill in nearly single-handedly setting up the American embassy in Moscow in 1934, in running the German embassy between 1939 and 1941, and in providing leadership among the Americans that the Nazis had interned at Bad Nauheim from December 1941

to May 1942. After the war, he was the key figure who established the State Department's Policy Planning Staff, and ran it during its most effective and influential period. On his return to the United States from his periods abroad, he found himself out of sympathy and rather puzzled by American culture and politics. Yet, unlike many who live abroad for long periods, he did not become fully comfortable in another culture, although obviously enthralled by Central and Eastern Europe, particularly the Soviet Union and Russian culture. With his extensive credentials for the job, President Truman appointed him ambassador to the Soviet Union in 1952, yet he was the least successful of all, staying but five months before Stalin declared him persona non grata, the only American ambassador in Moscow ever to achieve that distinction. At the end of his Foreign Service career, he went on to become a professor at the National War College, and, from time to time, lectured in Newport at the Naval War College.

On leaving the Foreign Service, Kennan went to the Institute for Advanced Research at Princeton University, where he continued his quixotic career, writing history, but not fully accepted by the historical profession, winning numerous prizes for his writings, but still wondering why his thoughts were not acted on instantly by policy makers. Kennan was twice invited as a visiting professor at Oxford, but typically found the experience trivial, choosing to isolate himself as much as he could.

The extensive contradictions in Kennan's character make for a remarkable study of an individual, but they explain, too, why Kennan never became an effective senior leader in government, although remaining influential as a public intellectual.

John Gaddis's fine book can be read on several levels for several purposes. Readers of this journal may find it a fascinating case study of the successes and frustrations of an intellectual who is trying to educate serving officials as they put a grand strategy in place. At the same time, it is a case study that illustrates the problems and frustrations for a government in trying to employ such talented and sensitive individuals.

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Harrod, J. E., ed. *Turning the Tide: The Battles of Coral Sea and Midway*. Plymouth, Devon, U.K.: Univ. of Plymouth Press, 2013. 232pp. £35

The latest volume of the Britannia Naval Histories of World War II revisits the Royal Navy's official histories of two pivotal naval battles. Taken from the previously classified battle summaries, numbers 45 and 46, this newly printed edition is a valuable aid to the study of two groundbreaking carrier battles in the Pacific War.

Originally drafted and written between 1946 and 1951, these insightful summaries were meant to provide lessons learned for the Royal Navy officer corps studying maritime warfare in the first decade of the postwar era. As noted in Philip Grove's introduction, these official histories "cross-refer and blend the official publications more than published works of the same era." *Turning the Tide* enables twenty-first-century readers to revisit the myths of the battles and reconsider the decisions that the leaders of the U.S. Navy and the Imperial Japanese Navy faced during those months of uncertainty in 1942. While we