

Different Interpretations of the Cold War

Type of Interpretation	Key Beliefs of this interpretation.	How the context of the time affects it.
<p>Traditionalist/ Orthodox</p> <p>Blamed the USSR</p> <p>late 1940s until the early 1960s</p>	<p>Key Historians who agreed with this view were Thomas Bailey, George Kennan and Herbert Feis. Both Kennan and Feis had held advisory roles in US government at the start of the Cold War.</p> <p>Bailey said the USSR wanted world revolution and their actions in Eastern Europe caused the Cold War.</p> <p>Kennan said Stalin needed a threatening enemy so people would accept his tough dictatorship to stay safe.</p> <p>Feis said the USSR were trying to spread communism and the USA were forced to respond.</p>	<p>At this time it was difficult to counter this argument as people who did might be considered communist sympathisers or spies. It was known as the RED SCARE. Many historians censored their own work to avoid this. Some people- such as William Appleman Williams- claimed the USSR were acting in self defence.</p>
<p>Revisionist</p> <p>Blamed the USA</p> <p>Mid 1960s until the mid 1970s</p>	<p>This was the first challenge to the traditional orthodox approach. A key historian of this view was William Appleman Williams.</p> <p>They said that</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The US provoked the Cold War by trying to achieve economic dominance in Europe • The Marshall Plan was aimed at reducing the chance of post war depression as that would impact on US trade, which is why they only helped capitalist countries not others. • Truman’s tough stance made USSR feel threatened which is why they reacted aggressively 	<p>William Appleman Williams began this with his view on the US handling of the Cuban Revolution (when Castro came to power). He argued the US was acting like an aggressive empire building nation. The war in Vietnam (1960s-70s) made people believe it as America had fought against communism by supporting a corrupt regime, killing tens of thousands of innocent civilians by using chemical weapons and at the same time had neglected its duty to the poorest members of society at home.</p>
<p>Post-Revisionist</p> <p>No-one was directly to blame</p> <p>early 1970s until 1989</p>	<p>John Lewis Gaddis rejected the view of William Appleman Williams and said;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Cold War was a result of fear, confusion and misunderstandings on both sides. • The actions of the USSR and particularly Stalin and the US policy of misunderstanding and over-exaggerating the strength and intentions of the USSR and their subsequent retaliation caused the conflict. <p>Gaddis work had a huge impact amongst historians. Many didn’t agree with the traditional view but didn’t feel comfortable being openly critical of American policies.</p>	<p>In the early 1970s following the US failure in Vietnam the US began working closer with Communist countries such as China and the USSR. They even agreed the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (SALT). This led historians to review earlier views.</p>
<p>Post 1991</p> <p>Blame the USSR again</p> <p>Began as the Cold War ended</p>	<p>New Soviet sources of evidence became available to US historians. There were literally millions of new sources to consider.</p> <p>A key historian who did so was John Lewis Gaddis, began to revise his view and he blamed the Cold War on Stalin’s personality, on authoritarian government, and on Communist ideology. This was supposed to unite all historians on that view but it didn’t. They all pushed forward their own interpretations.</p>	<p>President Ronald Reagan had been following an aggressive policy towards the USSR towards the end of the Cold War – he called it the ‘Evil Empire’. Many traditionalist orthodox historians agreed with this and found new sources in the archives that supported their original views</p>