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INTRODUCTION

THE FAMOUS "X"—the anonymous strategist who burst on the scene in 1946–1947 with a plan for blocking, even besting, the seemingly unstoppable Soviet Union—was soon identified as George Frost Kennan. The once obscure diplomat quickly rose to become America's top Russian expert and the founding director of the State Department's Policy Planning Staff. Later, as an establishment icon dressed in an old-fashioned, three-piece suit with a heavy gold watch chain, Kennan would remain associated with the containment doctrine until his death at 101.

Given this thumbnail sketch, how to account for Kennan's "blubbering" while watching a performance of Anton Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard* because the play stirred up "my Russian self" which was "much more genuine than the American one"?[1] Even as the strategist championed rational realism in foreign policy, powerful emotions coursed through his personal and professional life. Though widely respected and honored by presidents and the public, Kennan judged his career a failure because he had been dropped as a pilot of U.S. foreign policy. A success at helping initiate the Cold War, he fizzled in trying to end it. In his mid-nineties, he warned that expanding NATO eastward threatened democracy in Russia and renewed hostility with Moscow. This pioneering, even radical, environmentalist pointed to the machine as the root cause of economic exploitation and environmental depredation. A devoted family man, Kennan repeatedly strayed from his marriage despite the ensuing guilt. He viewed himself as a scion of an earlier time cast astray in a twentieth-century world. Indeed, the abandoned child would remain the foundational story of his life.

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FIGURE 1. Deep currents flowed below Kennan's immaculate exterior. (Courtesy of Joan E. Kennan.)

February through April were always difficult months for Kennan. It was not the weather; he loved the cold and early spring. But he hated revisiting the agony that had beset his mother, Florence James Kennan, from shortly after he was born on February 16, 1904, to her death from a burst appendix on April 19 of the same year. As a young boy, he suffered that pain partly out of the mistaken belief that she had died from the complications of his birth. As an adult, Kennan year after year would take sick or succumb to depression during those dark months. He would die on March 17, 2005.

Two years earlier, so crippled by arthritis that he could barely walk, he was lying in bed in his Hodge Road house in Princeton, New Jersey, and talking with Doug James, the son of his cousin and childhood best

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friend, Charlie. Kennan was trying to put his long life into context. What accounted for his persistent longing for succor and intimacy? Reflecting on his mother, he lamented that he had been "torn away from her breast." The violation was so abrupt and final that it "affected me for life. Subconsciously, this was a trauma for myself and for her." Kennan, who regarded Freudian theory as settled science, blamed his restless quest for sexual intimacy as an adult on this rupture of maternal intimacy as an infant. What he referred to as "my weakness" stemmed from "the shock of what happened to me" as an infant.[2]

Kennan's lifelong yearning for deep familiarity and closeness, for union with some wondrous mystery and beauty, went far beyond sex, however. Long before he became America's foremost strategist on the Soviet Union during the pivotal years of the early Cold War, Kennan invested his desires in the people and culture of Russia. As both the rational strategist mapping out plans for containing and isolating the Soviet Union and the emotional man beset by longing to connect with the Russian people, Kennan was wrenched almost unbearably.

Though flawed in many ways, Kennan shines as an unsung hero of the Cold War. While most people focus on the inflammatory manifestos he penned in 1946 and 1947 that helped ignite the Cold War, they underplay his pivot in the opposite direction soon thereafter. In the four decades from 1949 to the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, Kennan, as U.S. government official and then as public intellectual, devoted his formidable talents to pushing for negotiation and compromise with the Russia that he would always love. His repeated pointing to this and that opportunity for a settlement with Moscow offers an alternate history of the Cold War, one in which that struggle, which always entailed the danger of nuclear Armageddon, might have ended decades earlier and more safely. Why Kennan the Cold Warrior was lauded as the all-wise Grand Strategist and why Kennan the critic of that conflict was often dismissed as a sentimental poet says much about the political culture and emotional sensibility of America. After the Cold War, Kennan presciently argued for bolstering Russia's fragile democracy with a new, European-wide security organization that would replace NATO and mitigate the division between East and West.

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As a young boy, George was yanked away not only from his mother but also from a succession of nurses and, most sorrowfully, from "Cousin Grace" Wells, whom he had wanted to call mother. She was a beloved relative of his mother hired to care for George and his three older sisters. After three happy years, Grace had to leave when the children's father, Kossuth "Kent" Kennan, remarried. These breaches scarred him, George would later believe.

The emotional security of young George was shaken further by suspicions of an egregious infidelity committed by his father. Both temperament and training inclined Kennan toward privacy. He praised restraint even more than he practiced it. He regarded public displays of emotion and revelations of intimate secrets as vulgar. While his diary is rife with allusions to his various affairs and his subsequent guilt, he remained elusive as to details. Now, however, in this 2003 interview with Doug James, he opened up for the first time about a shocking scandal.

When Florence Kennan at age forty-four was dying in great pain from a burst appendix, her three young daughters were called in to kiss their feverish mother goodbye. Infant George nursed until almost the end. Florence's brother and sister-in-law—Charlie's parents, Alfred and Nellie James—and Florence's parents all hovered nearby. Conspicuously absent, however, was her husband. "Uncle Alfred and Aunt Nellie suspected my father of being away for no good purpose," George explained. They believed he had "another woman somewhere." Kent, however, would always claim that he had been on a hunting trip. "I should have insisted on talking with my father" about this before he died, the son realized too late. Shyness on both sides and perhaps also this dark suspicion had hampered meaningful communication between George and his father. While "Uncle Alfred and Aunt Nellie were always very nice to me and to my sisters," they never forgave his father.[3] Personality differences, financial tensions, and conflicts over Kent's later decisions to remarry and to send his son off to a military school further poisoned relations between the maternal and paternal sides of young George's family.

Though he would live a long life, Kennan seems never to have gotten over this cratering of his emotional security. Losing his mother as an

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infant loomed as the defining story of his life, one he felt compelled to tell over and over. He emphasized the loss in his diary and memoir, to his authorized biographer, to his children, to caregivers, and in the final interview of his life. An astute observer of the adult George Kennan was Mary Acheson Bundy, a Princeton friend of the Kennans and the daughter of Kennan's former boss, Dean Acheson. Her own son had suffered trauma when she was quarantined with tuberculosis during his first year. George "liked Mary Bundy a lot," his daughter, Grace, would remember.[4] Looking beyond the shell of George's outward sociability, Mary discerned a "haunting sadness, deep in him. It's an awfully big part of him." She added, "You don't have to go very far, psychologically, to discover that almost everything starts before you even can think."[5]

Kennan did go far, however, when it came to what he regarded as psychological science. He analyzed both his personal life and foreign policy issues in psychological terms. He kept a diary of his dreams, and he suspected that some were communications from an outside source. He had read Freud in a sanatorium in Vienna in 1935 while being treated, though not psychoanalyzed, by a Freudian-minded doctor. He believed that the life patterns of nations paralleled those of individual humans. As America's preeminent strategist on Russia in the 1940s, he diagnosed the Soviet Union as a neurotic, at times psychotic, patient who needed calm management by policy makers such as himself playing the rational doctor. The pervasive influence of Freudian theories in mid-twentieth-century America gave credibility to Kennan's often reductive psychological explanations.[6]

Freud's *Civilization and Its Discontents* had convinced Kennan that "at the center of our psychic construction [is] a libido, the demands of which, as Freud has demonstrated, we ignore at our peril."[7] Warring with the "instinct to reproduce" were the "taboos and penalties" of civilization. If a man—and Kennan nearly always regarded the male gender as normative—was "caught between the cogs of nature and those of society," he would be "rubbed to pieces."[8] More than sexual freedom stood at stake. Kennan regarded the libido as the control switch for vitality and intellectual and esthetic creativity. While inciting chaos, the erotic force also enabled escape from deadly boredom. As a young man,

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he feared that by upholding "the laws of society," in particular his "dignity as a husband, a father, and an official," he was being forced into "a renunciation of [his] own life."[9]

He would forever view Freud's notion of a dichotomy between Eros and Civilization as framing the dilemmas of his own life. In endeavors ranging from foreign policy to lifestyle, he felt torn between what he called unconventional and conventional solutions. Even though he longed to escape professional duties, and at times broke down in order to break free, he also impressed superiors with his fierce work ethic. He acted on his desire for extramarital affairs, while also reproaching himself and remaining with his wife for nearly three-quarters of a century. As Kennan saw it, Civilization entailed the bourgeois (or Communist) order that kept diplomatic channels humming, trains running, and society functioning. Eros invited not only creativity, but also immersion to the point of a liberating obliteration of self.

This Freudian dilemma loomed so large in Kennan's world view that in 1962, while serving as ambassador to Yugoslavia, he chose it as the topic of his Palm Sunday sermon to the Protestant Church Group in Belgrade. Perhaps because he was feeling battered by the political struggles of his ambassadorship, he lifted the veil on his personal difficulties. He praised Freud's insight about "what slaves we all of us are to our vanity, to the emotional fixations of our early youth . . . and not least to the frequently chaotic and destructive urgings of the sexual instinct." These drives impelled "a real conflict between man's emotional nature and his effort to lead the civilized life." Repressing Eros to satisfy Civilization triggered neurosis. He noted that nations with "the most highly disciplined and orderly and successful civilization" also suffered "the highest rates of mental illness."

In sum, Freud in Kennan's view had applied science to reaffirm original sin. The strategist drew two lessons from the conundrum. First, was the need for personal humility. "Man" was a cracked vessel. Therefore, "no one is entirely wonderful." This view excused sexual and other transgressions as inevitable and understandable. Second, in terms of political arrangements, such utopian ideologies as communism were doomed to excess and ultimate failure.[10]

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Kennan took this analysis to heart because it fit his conflicting impulses. He felt both enticed and endangered by the prospect of escaping into a bohemian life or in writing a novel so meaningful that it would consume him. Though he dreamed about a wondrous union with the people of Russia, he remained an American. Despite the prevailing image of Kennan as an impeccably dressed icon of the establishment, as he was viewed by millions in televised Senate hearings questioning the Vietnam War, he remained far more complex. He imputed emotions to nature, empathized with God, and half-believed in fairies.

He ran away from boarding school, imagined running away from Princeton, longed to drop diplomacy to become a deckhand on a tramp steamer, and, as an old man, yearned to abandon his civic and social responsibilities in Princeton for a secluded farm in northern New England. Nevertheless, he had dutifully returned to boarding school, and he never acted on the other fantasies.

Kennan's need to salve the loneliness within him, his efforts to combat the depression that often engulfed him, and his search for mysterious meaning in a quotidian world—all these cravings became entangled in his complex relationship with Russia. He detested the Soviet government that had betrayed the idealism of the Bolshevik Revolution, perpetrated the horrors of the 1930s purges, and extended its police-state rule into Eastern and Central Europe after World War II. Nevertheless, he loved the people and culture of Russia, especially those of the pre-1917 era. His fervor as a Cold Warrior flamed out as early as 1948, only months after publishing his famous "X" article in *Foreign Affairs* and two years after penning his influential long telegram of February 1946. Thereafter, he was most often pushing for negotiations to ease tensions. For decades he sought to get both the United States and the Soviet Union to pull back from their confrontation in Central Europe. After the Cold War, Kennan crusaded against the expansion of NATO into the domains of the former Soviet Union. Even the strategist's ill-advised and regretted support for covert CIA operations in Eastern Europe in the late 1940s was intended to pressure the Soviets into realizing that they were overextended.

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Kennan was beguiled by the notion that by immersing himself, somehow, in Russia he might find the wondrous presence that he desired while escaping the Eros versus Civilization dilemma that he dreaded. He saw the land and the people, though not the government, of Russia as appealingly feminine in ways both maternal and erotic. He imagined the Russian people and their government as "a beautiful lady guarded by a jealous lover."[11] In this scenario he figured as the true partner of the beloved. He rhapsodized about the "powerful maternal thighs of the female Slav."[12] He lauded the Russian Church, which idealized the Virgin Mary, for its "tolerant, maternal" influence.[13] Even as a dignified ambassador, he could not refrain from celebrating "the great good earth of Mother Russia . . . exud[ing] her benevolent and maternal warmth" over all. Nor could he ignore the pain that only he, the American emissary flanked by his secret-police minders, was "effectively isolated" from that deep satisfaction.[14] A dream had him "searching for his mother in a crowd of Russian peasants."[15]

A family tie also drew him to Russia. A cousin of his grandfather, George Kennan (1845–1924), had gained fame for travels in czarist Russia and for publicizing the grim penal system in Siberia. Kennan had been named after this relative, and they shared the same birthday. Other coincidences would connect their lives. The younger Kennan, whose own father remained cool and distant, admired the pioneering Russophile as a paternal model. In Moscow, Kennan would be delighted to hear from Mikhail Kalinin, the nominal president, that his forebear's writings on Siberia had been the bible for the revolutionists.[16]

George F. Kennan wanted this complex life story, with the embarrassments smoothed away, to be understood by those who came after him. From age eleven to one hundred, he kept a diary that he expected to be read by others. He mused about publishing his collected works, which by his life's end would amount to over 330 archival boxes. He took great care in choosing his biographer while discouraging aspirants he feared would distort the story.

In his very first interview with his authorized biographer, John Lewis Gaddis, Kennan made sure that the political historian understood three basic elements of his life. Amid an explanation of why Marxism had

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never appealed to him, he interjected that with regard to "my own loneliness . . . I was affected neurotically by the absence of a mother." He found Freud more helpful than Marx. Second was his love for the culture and language of Russia, "a source of unending pleasure and wonder to me." Third was how his senses and imagination picked up on the esthetic qualities of localities. "I read all sorts of mystery and beauty . . . into landscapes and places, and also into music." Every city and landscape disclosed "not only a different atmosphere but a different sort of music and intonation." He felt "immensely sensitive and responsive" to these sensations.

Kennan was gifted in his ability to reduce to words not only perceptions that transcended the bounds of sight and sound, but also the feelings flowing from such observation. At especially poignant moments in his life, such as when he sought to make rational sense of the horrors of Stalin's purges, or when he imagined communication with his deceased mother or father, he succeeded in translating turbulent feelings into words. It took poetry to really convey what he perceived, he knew, and indeed, "I was part artist." In his younger years, he had dreamed about leaving the Foreign Service and writing a great novel. But "art is open-ended" in its emotional demands, and "I didn't have a balanced enough personal life to have gone into this expression of the emotions without being torn to pieces by it."[17] Achieving a personal life with greater equilibrium required reconciling, somehow, the competing pulls of Eros and Civilization.

What particularly tore Kennan apart was his passion for Russia. A visit to Leningrad in September 1945, only weeks after the end of World War II, demonstrated both the reach of his supersensory perceptions and the elegant prose they could inspire. Though newly arrived in the city, "it was like coming home." He had read so much about this capital of czarist Russia, and he had envisioned it from across the Baltic during his years in Riga, Latvia. He discerned in this dark, damp, and cold city "a strange warmth, a strange intensity, a strange beauty." Giving free rein to his imagination and intuition inspired arguably the most exquisite sentence written by Kennan in his eighty-eight years as a diarist: "I know that in this city, where I have never lived, there has nevertheless,

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by some strange quirk of fate—a previous life, perhaps?—been deposited a portion of my own capacity to feel and to love, a portion, in other words, of my own life; and that this is something which no American will ever understand and no Russian ever believe."[18] There he stood, between America and Russia, and enveloped for a moment in the wondrous mystery that he pursued all his life.

Nevertheless, while Kennan in his private thoughts mused about a possible previous life in Leningrad, Kennan in his public image as Washington's foremost strategist of the Cold War remained an American, even if a quirky one.

After joining the Foreign Service in 1926 and then rising faster in the ranks than anyone else in his age cohort, Kennan in February 1946 broke into the Washington inner circle with his famous long telegram. This 5,500-word alarm intoned the death of the World War II alliance with Moscow (attempts at further cooperation would amount to appeasement) while explaining how to resist Soviet expansion without going to war. His July 1947 article in *Foreign Affairs,* attributed to an anonymous "X," spelled out the policy of containment that would forever remain associated with his name. Also couched in alarmist language depicting the Soviet Union as an existential threat, the manifesto nevertheless assured that the Kremlin was not bent on war. The Soviets could be contained by rebuilding the economy and morale of Western Europe and by addressing the weaknesses in U.S. society, faults that had long disturbed Kennan. Although the strategist intended the United States to contain the Soviets using political and economic means rather than military force, he presented the threat in such dire terms that many Americans, understandably, concluded that containment mandated a military buildup. Moreover, while Kennan believed that only a few major industrial areas around the globe—Britain, Western Europe, and Japan—merited Washington's commitment of resources, the long telegram and the "X" article mentioned no such geographical limits. Nor did the administration adhere to such limits when President Harry S. Truman in March 1947 announced the doctrine that the United States would oppose Communist aggression and radical change wherever they occurred. These gaps between what Kennan intended and what he

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wrote would later grow into a chasm that cast him once again on the wrong side of power.

THE STRATEGIST

But that problem still lay in the future as Kennan in 1946–1947 won acclaim as the Truman administration's premier expert on the Soviet Union. He basked in the glow of attention from such power brokers as Secretary of the Navy (and soon to be the first Secretary of Defense) James V. Forrestal. Thrilled by this newfound respect and feeling of belonging, Kennan swam with the tide of Cold War militancy more than he later would admit. In late summer 1946, after a lecture tour through the western states, the rising star became Deputy Commandant for Foreign Affairs at the National War College in Washington. He read widely, talked with such faculty as the pioneering nuclear strategist Bernard Brodie, and delivered to midlevel military officers fourteen lectures on such topics as "Measures Short of War," "The Soviet Way of Thought and Its Effect on Foreign Policy," and "What Is Policy?" Kennan ascended still higher in May 1947, when Secretary of State George C. Marshall honored him with the dream job of founding director of the State Department's Policy Planning Staff. Little more than two years after Kennan, languishing in bed with a bad cold in far-off Moscow, had dictated the long telegram, he commanded an office next to Secretary Marshall's and a purview that included all of U.S. foreign policy.

Those National War College lectures and a stream of Policy Planning Staff papers constituted a remarkable output from someone now so engaged in influencing others and crafting policies that he had no time or inclination to grumble in his diary. His diary entries for 1946 amount only to notes for lectures on strategy, while 1947 included only a one-page rhyme.

Kennan's policy recommendations reflected his grasp of economics, particularly the economies of scale that would result from the integration of Europe, and the crisis arising from Europe's lack of dollars to buy needed American products. He addressed these concerns with his most significant initiative, the Marshall Plan. With generous aid funded by

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U.S. taxpayers, Washington assisted Western Europeans in recovering from wartime devastation while modernizing and integrating their national economies. This was the model that early in World War II he had hoped an enlightened German occupation would implement. He pushed as well for rebuilding the Japanese economy.

Kennan also planned policies to thwart Soviet ambitions, at times using or advocating means more militarized than he would later like to recall. He helped set the CIA on the path of political warfare, an effort that soon got beyond his control and that he would regret.[19] He pushed for psychological warfare and covert military operations within the Soviet bloc, especially in Albania. He worked to sway the crucial 1948 election in Italy with targeted food aid, a letter-writing campaign by Italian Americans, and tours by Hollywood stars. Kennan also prepared to go much further. When it looked as if the Communists might win the election in Italy, he urged militarily reoccupying that nation even if it sparked a civil war. With regard to the Middle East, Latin America, Africa, and much of Asia, Kennan recommended only limited U.S. action. He viewed these areas as dangerously entangling and strategically unimportant.

While taking bold steps, he downplayed the terminology of Grand Strategy. In notes taken in 1946 on a lecture with that title, he penned "Drop the word 'grand.'"[20] Kennan's lectures and his Policy Planning Staff papers would nevertheless become the basis for his reputation as America's Grand Strategist. Grand Strategy envisioned a coordinated, holistic response that mobilized all the tools and resources of government to achieve a specific, doable task or policy. The concept emphasized realistic appraisal of goals and means with a healthy appreciation of unexpected developments and consequences.[21]

Nevertheless, while Kennan's writings and policies from 1946–1948 retain a secure perch in the pantheon of conventional American Grand Strategy, Kennan himself soon trended elsewhere. From the late 1940s onward, he advocated an unconventional strategy that could be categorized, depending on one's outlook, as either more or less "grand." In February 1948, barely six months after his warning in the "X" article about the implacable Soviets, Kennan was already musing about a

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diplomatic deal with them. That impulse would intensify. Kennan's Plan A for Germany in 1948–1949, which called for negotiating with Moscow to achieve a reunified, neutral, and demilitarized Germany, and his opposition in 1949–1950 to developing the "super" or hydrogen bomb addressed the two core issues of the Cold War: who would control Germany, and how to control nuclear weapons. In both cases, Kennan looked toward containing conflict rather than escalating it. That stance applied also to Eastern and Central Europe. Despite the partisan furor between Secretaries of State Acheson and Dulles over containment versus rollback, both their administrations—and subsequent U.S. policy down to 1989—favored getting the Russians out of the satellite nations. While the thrust of U.S. policy was largely to pressure the Kremlin to withdraw, Kennan wanted to pressure the Russians and then negotiate a joint pullback. His disengagement policy amounted to mutual rollback through diplomacy.

In the context of the Cold War, serious diplomacy remained unconventional. Kennan regarded containment as an if-then proposition. If the Soviets were contained, then they would become amenable to serious negotiations. By contrast, Acheson, Dulles, and other Cold Warriors expected the conflict to continue until Moscow's unconditional surrender. They saw the Cold War as useful in terms of corralling allies and keeping Congress and the public compliant. Kennan's unconventional strategy arguably ranked as grander than that of his opponents in Washington. He sought actual diplomacy, big agreements reached through difficult, extended negotiations, ideally by him talking in Russian with Stalin or a successor.

Viewed through another lens, Kennan favored a strategy less grand than that of conventional policy makers because he was not a big fan of the empire. He judged the United States as too incompetent to manage a formal or informal empire, and the costs as outweighing the benefits. His plowing through Edward Gibbon's *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* while on long transatlantic flights during the war had convinced him that empires invariably frayed and then collapsed.

Throughout the Cold War, the would-be Grand Diplomatist kept pushing for negotiations with Moscow. He urged Acheson to seek

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Moscow's help in ending the war in Korea. As ambassador to Moscow in 1952, he ached to initiate serious talks with the Soviets. In his famous Reith lectures in 1957, he laid out a plan for mutual disengagement in Europe. He favored talks to end the crisis over Berlin and to end the war in Vietnam. In the 1970s–1980s, Kennan proposed dramatic reductions in nuclear arms as well as joint U.S.-Russian efforts to address environmental degradation. In the 1990s, he vehemently opposed NATO expansion into the former Soviet bloc, fearing it would trigger yet another Cold War.

The significance of Kennan's unconventional strategy was that it pointed out potential turning points, junctures when Washington and Moscow might have negotiated a lessening of tensions and the nuclear danger. The narrative of Kennan's unsuccessful efforts from 1948 to 1988 to ease the Cold War is the story of what might have been, the diplomacy that could have yielded enormous benefit to the world. Kennan's efforts traced an alternative history of the Cold War, one in which the conflict eased or ended far earlier.

In this context, Kennan's love for Russia, his quest for some mystical connection with Russia—impulses that stemmed in part from the hurt and loneliness in his psyche going back to the loss of his mother—had enormous consequences for policy. His feelings for the Russians impelled him to seek reconnection with the Soviets and to perceive issues also from the Kremlin's perspective. Though he had denigrated diplomacy with the Russians in the long telegram and in the "X" article, he himself could not adhere for long to those restraints. The story of Kennan the unconventional strategist bears as much importance as the better known history of Kennan the conventional Grand Strategist.

Kennan had sought not Moscow's abrupt capitulation in the Cold War, but rather a negotiated compromise. A diplomatist at heart, he venerated the process of patient, secret bargaining by calculating, shrewd professionals. He disdained summit conferences as showy disruptions by bungling amateurs, whether the perceived offender was Franklin D. Roosevelt meeting with Joseph Stalin—and shutting out not only Kennan, but the entire State Department—or Ronald Reagan's conclaves with Mikhail Gorbachev.

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In the emerging post–Cold War era, Kennan remained a bit of a Russian nationalist. He feared the breakup of the Soviet Union would destabilize geopolitics and endanger control over nuclear weapons. He thought it unwise for Ukraine to break away from Russia. He believed that not only should reunified Germany disengage from NATO and the Warsaw Pact, but that those two alliances should be replaced by a European-wide security agreement. He envisioned the post–Cold War world as an arena in which the contenders would rely on diplomacy, not war, to settle their inevitable differences. He looked to a concerted international effort to safeguard the natural environment. Kennan wanted the United States to pull back from trying to manage a global informal empire. He believed that such efforts were not only doomed, but also diverted attention and resources from America's pressing domestic problems.

FAMILY AND INNER LIFE

The unconventionality of Kennan's thoughts and feelings coupled with the privacy of his nature did not make it easy to understand him. While still in his twenties, he consigned himself to "intellectual isolation."[22] The problem was not eased by his marriage to Annelise Sorensen. Years later, when asked by his authorized biographer about her role in his life, George replied, "Well, you must realize that she's not a particularly intellectual woman."[23]

Nevertheless, a sense of the inner George Kennan emerges from the day-to-day observations of Annelise and of their four children: Grace, born in 1932, Joan (1936), Christopher (1949), and Wendy (1952). Also pertinent are the observations of the grandchildren. "The shadow of his example still falls over all of us," a grandson testified years after Kennan's death. He added that the four children of George and Annelise, even late in their own lives, "all have their scars."[24] The force of Kennan's personality and the magnitude of his abilities and achievements made it difficult to follow in his footsteps.

Kennan's insatiable curiosity, inherent creativity, and indefatigable work ethic impelled him into fresh ventures. Grace marveled at his

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"huge appetite for life." He studied medieval architecture while in Russia and modern agriculture for the Pennsylvania farm purchased in 1942. He pursued bird-watching and woodworking. He mastered sailing and celestial navigation on the open seas around Scandinavia aboard the *Nagawicka* and then the *Northwind*. With pulleys and a crowbar he leveraged huge stones into place for steps at the family's Norwegian summer home. As Wendy affirmed, her father was "physically strong, had incredible concentration, and could think through a problem without getting distracted." Christopher marveled that his father knew engineering and "could explain how a steam engine worked." Although color blindness stymied Kennan's painting, he filled many a sketchbook with drawings. A natural musician, he taught himself not only how to read music but also how to play the guitar, piano, cornet, banjo, and French horn. He sang mournful Russian folk songs. He played in a jazz band in military school and in an orchestra at Princeton, for the "Kremlin Krows" ensemble in wartime Moscow, and on the terrace below Wendy's bedroom in Princeton as she fell asleep. He loved ballet, opera, and classical music as well as jazz.[25]

While such recreation helped balance his work ethic, Kennan devoted most of the years after leaving the State Department in 1950 to writing. He would rise at six, eat a breakfast of oatmeal, and then climb the stairs to his office. At the farm in East Berlin, "he wrote on the highest floor in a quest for peace and quiet. A trapdoor closed it off from the rest of the house," Joan recalled. "My father had a simple, homemade table and his old Underwood typewriter—the kind that is rather tall with rows of letter in a 'stadium seating' arrangement. Here he would click and clack for hours in the morning."[26] The office was stuffed with books and old Soviet journals and newspapers. At the Hodge Road house in Princeton, he chose the fourth-floor tower for his academic writing. While the height of the tower offered a panoramic view from all five windows, it also obliged him to lug up firewood for the woodstove. George used other rooms of the huge house for writing his diary and letters. Whether with writing or with voice, Kennan remained the storyteller.

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The imagination that filled the long telegram and the "X" article with exaggerated dangers functioned more benignly to populate stories for young Grace and Joan. He told tales of the pixies Tom and Belle and built a playhouse for a fictitious Uncle Zachariah. He made up stories of animals with names and personalities and acted out their talking to each other. Kennan read aloud to his children from a variety of books ranging from *The Wizard of Oz* to *War and Peace*. Beloved as "Bumpa" by his grandsons, he set aside a private time for each of them at holiday gatherings. He would invite them to his bedroom and ask how and what they were doing. "We all had absolute reverence for him," a grandson recalled. A granddaughter did not, however, come away with such loving memories. Nor could he always find it easy to relate to a younger generation. When a grandson brought his date to Princeton for lunch with the great man, Kennan, upon hearing that the young woman hailed from Utah, responded, "So, what's the soil like there?"[27]

Although he loved his children, George delegated their actual rearing to Annelise. She in turn hired caregivers. Annelise was not a hands-on mother, one daughter remembered. George allowed situations to develop in which neither parent "paid attention to the kids' being unhappy," as Grace later explained. "The welfare and ease of their kids was not of paramount concern." In the summer of 1953, when the family was departing for its annual vacation in Norway, traveling on a freighter to save money, it seemed too much trouble to take along Wendy, then little more than a year old. So the parents left the toddler with a Czech couple who knew little English. By the time the family returned to Princeton, Wendy had lost the ability to speak any language, Grace observed to her dismay. The parents did not make it a point to appear for all the children's birthdays. Nor did they attend Grace's wedding in Washington in the spring of 1958, when George had a fellowship at Oxford. At the reception, the bride, who had been expecting a surprise appearance from her parents, received instead a transatlantic phone call. "I just wept," she recalled. "It was very painful."[28]

Although George and Annelise remained married for nearly three-quarters of a century, grew closer in their last years, and concurred on a

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traditional division of labor, they were not a tight fit. Mary Acheson Bundy observed a telling detail: "I never heard him say 'we'—it was always 'I.'"[29] George confided to Grace, "It's so painful being with your mother because I can't talk with her." Nevertheless, they made an attractive couple: "He was so smart, and she was so beautiful; she looked like Greta Garbo," the daughter would recall.[30]

As the eldest child, Grace observed the marriage as evolving in three stages. The years 1931 to 1940 proved a time of physical love and establishing a family for the two young daughters. Yet even then, George confided in his diary that "the technique of marriage is nothing more or less than the art of dissimulation."[31] In the second stage, wartime dangers, George's internment by the Germans in the first half of 1942, his heavy responsibilities before and after that ordeal—plus some voluntary separation—kept them often apart. Kennan's rocketing career in 1946–1950 led to further strains, prompting their daughter to "really worry about their getting divorced." Perhaps in retaliation for George's wartime affairs, Annelise had a fling in Lisbon and "a big romance in Moscow," Grace recalled. When the not-yet-famous journalist John Hersey came for tea with her mother in Moscow, the twelve-year-old daughter hung around out of fear that they were more than friends. Then, years later in the third stage, "Father accepted the marriage," though he still "missed having a woman he could talk to." Grace suspected that the arrival of Christopher thirteen years after the previous child reflected efforts to save the marriage.[32]

"You wonder why they got married," Christopher reflected decades later. His mother was "a party girl" who loved the social life, while his father had "this very active and rich inner life which he couldn't share with my mother." Hence he "idolized women who were his intellectual peers." His relationships with such stars as the Prussian aristocrat, anti-Nazi activist, and publisher Marion Dönhoff, and the journalist, novelist, and former wife of Ernest Hemingway Martha Gellhorn amounted to "affairs of the head as much as anything else." Grace saw her father as "very handsome with an almost movie star look." He "flirted with all kinds of women, especially intelligent women."

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And yet he could put women down. He could be ruthlessly sarcastic and condescending toward Annelise. He hounded her to lose her Norwegian accent. He continually marveled that Dönhoff had reached such heights though only a woman. When Grace described her serious executive responsibilities running a nonprofit organization in post-Soviet Ukraine, her father enthused: "You're so good, you could be the social secretary of the embassy in Moscow!" That hurt, especially since Grace had aspired to be in effect a first son. Nevertheless, she adored her father as someone "so smart, so prescient." Listening to him, "people knew they were hearing something very different."

Even smart, prescient talk could wear, however. "Dinner time was time to listen to Daddy," Grace recalled. Joan later wished that the children had been allowed to talk more at the table. When their father got rolling at dinner, it would turn into a monologue, Christopher remembered. "Everyone else would shut up." Even though the children would wince at their father's racist or otherwise prejudiced comments, they knew that "he didn't like to be argued with."[33] So they grimaced to themselves, and fled the table as soon as possible—just as George and his siblings had done decades earlier in Milwaukee. Kennan did not limit expostulation to family settings. The Princeton professor and expert on Woodrow Wilson, Arthur S. Link, related how at dinner parties, George liked to get up, "put his hands behind his back, walk back and forth, and give you a monologue . . . with everybody else sitting and listening." That Link treasured such occasions as "marvelous" suggests that he was not a regular at the Kennan family dinner table.[34] Although after such a public performance George would privately castigate himself for being so garrulous, his faith in his insights impelled further such presentations.

Both confident in his superior qualifications and shy, Kennan disliked "working the system" to snare some advantage. Christopher observed that his father "felt he was above badgering for power." Similarly, Kennan impressed an East Berlin neighbor as "one of the most humble men he had ever met." When the Lions Club launched a project to plant trees, George was the first one there that Saturday morning, ready with

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a shovel over his shoulder. And yet he never totally blended in, perhaps by choice. While dressed in regulation farm overalls, he also sported his trademark black beret. As Christopher perceived, while his father could appear "modest in behavior," he retained "a very healthy sense of his importance and abilities."[35]

Always the gracious hostess, Annelise backstopped her husband's career. She ensured organization and tidiness, whether in the Hodge Road house in Princeton, the cramped Moscow hotel room in 1934, or in the capacious Moscow and Belgrade embassies decades later. She almost always had hired help. Her charm did not, however, extend to the servants, who, resenting her imperious tone, often quit.

Aside from their stint in impoverished Riga in the early 1930s, where even a modest U.S. salary went far, the Kennans often struggled to pay the domestic help they considered essential. Annelise also devoted scarce funds to clothes and other things to keep herself attractive. Commenting on a sister whose husband had deserted her, she admonished Grace: "If Aunt Mossik had spent money on hired help and had gotten her hair done, she would not now be divorced." The summer trips to Norway and farm expenses also soaked up cash. Although George's State Department earnings rose steadily with his promotions and though he later received a generous salary from the Institute for Advanced Study, "the family was very worried about money all the time," Grace recalled. She had to work several jobs while at Radcliffe. During the five months in early 1942 when George was interned by the Germans, the State Department cut off his pay with the rationale that he was not working. Annelise, though lacking any visible means of support, rented a house in upscale Bronxville, New York, courtesy, it seems, of Carl Siegesmund, a longtime admirer. Annelise's fretting about money did not extend to feeling impelled to earn it. Apart from a brief period at the Lisbon legation during the war, she never worked. In Moscow in 1944–1946, where the U.S. embassy was hard-pressed for help, she remained the only unemployed wife.[36] These decisions evidently were not disputed by her husband.

As Christopher remembered it, his father, scarred by having lost his inheritance during the Great Depression, remained frugal. He kept part

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of his savings in gold secured in a vault in New York City. Nevertheless, he donated some of the $50,000 from the Einstein Peace Prize to the local historical society close by the farm. Though he idealized the simple life, most of George and Annelise's friends ranked as Princeton's high society and wealthy. Family finances eased only after 1967, with the publication of George's best-selling *Memoirs, 1925–1950,* as well as other books, the Einstein Peace Prize in 1981, and lucrative lecture fees.[37]

While such family perspectives are necessarily skewed and scattered, they bring into focus a devoted (though not always loyal) husband and a loving (though not always engaged) father. If it was difficult being George F. Kennan, it was also often difficult being a member of his family.

TALENTED YET FRAGILE

As for more distant observers, few could dispute that Kennan was, literally, extraordinary. His impressive talents were exceeded only by his ambitions. Precariously balanced with the abilities and aspirations was what Mary A. Bundy observed as "George's very sensitive and fragile temperament." "He collapsed a lot; he needed understanding," she explained.[38]

Dorothy Fosdick, the only woman on the Policy Planning Staff while Kennan was director, testified that her boss "had a strong messianic streak. I always felt he thought he should have been Secretary of State himself." He felt "superior to everyone around him." In the late 1950s, when he was making waves by calling for negotiations with Moscow, Kennan regarded "himself as a world statesman," Isaiah Berlin recalled. "He said he thought he and [Indian prime minister Jawaharlal] Nehru were perhaps unique figures . . . having a political doctrine to offer to the world."[39]

Kennan had reason to feel superior. William P. "Bill" Bundy, Mary's husband, who was a top State Department official and later editor of *Foreign Affairs,* conceded that his Princeton friend was often "twenty or thirty years ahead of anybody else's thinking."[40] According to the leading historian of the Policy Planning Staff, the work leading to the Marshall Plan, the rebuilding of Japan, the decision to limit aid to Nationalist

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China, and outreach to Tito's Yugoslavia after its break with Moscow merited Kennan the title of "America's Global Planner."[41] As a diplomat, he rose to the top rank as director of the Policy Planning Staff; as a historian, he snared what was arguably the nation's most prestigious professorship, at the Institute for Advanced Study.

Elegant writing came easily to Kennan. Bundy commented, "I've never seen anybody whose mind and his pen were so synchronized as his." He remembered waiting for a late train on a "freezing, freezing day, in the barely heated Princeton Junction station. George sat there with yellow paper, pen flowing across the paper . . . just flowing."[42] His books garnered two National Book Awards, two Pulitzers, and a Bancroft prize. The Einstein Peace Prize was only one of many such awards. He could speak both German and Russian like a native. "No American spoke Russian the way George did," recalled the Princeton University political scientist Robert C. Tucker, who also had served in the Moscow embassy. "He speaks an intellectual kind of Russian that really cultured people speak," added his wife, herself a Russian native. While ambassador to Yugoslavia under President John F. Kennedy, Kennan learned Serbo-Croatian, a Slavic language quite different from Russian, well enough to give a public lecture. He also mastered Norwegian and French.

Though he often complained of fatigue, Kennan appeared to others as indefatigable. "He was incapable of just stopping and taking a few hours off," recounted a friend and neighbor. After the long drive to the farm, Kennan would immediately start "the tractor to mow the lawn. Then he'd rush inside and go upstairs to type . . . most of the night." Following an arduous sailing trip in Norway, the exhausted crew lay down, only to "hear a wheelbarrow going back and forth. Here was George building a set of steps."[43] Kennan, who over the years delivered hundreds of talks and labored over each one, would never give a lecture a second time around, a longtime secretary testified. Summing up her boss's approach to life, she marveled: "He never takes the easy way out, even with his bicycle."[44] It was on a heavy, old-fashioned bike lacking gears that he pedaled around Princeton.

Nevertheless, Kennan remained fragile. Fosdick remembered, "He could go into a bad slump when he thought he was not being listened

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to." In such a crisis, he would take her to lunch "and pour out his heart to me." He explained to her that providing such solace "was a natural role for a woman. Women throughout history had been confidential advisers to monarchs." Fosdick prized her role of confidant/comforter as "a very high compliment." Venturing into pop psychology, she suggested that her boss's "attitude toward women grew out of deep psychological considerations. . . . George had a strong desire to return to the womb."[45]

Kennan always pushed himself hard. Rather than ease up, he broke down. His daughter Wendy recalled that her father was "never able to take a normal vacation. Getting ill was his way of calming himself down."[46] When the strain got too intense, he would collapse, as he did in Moscow in December 1934, while serving as PPS director in 1948, after his controversial Reith broadcasts in 1957, and on other occasions.

Kennan suffered ill health throughout his long life. Scarlet fever contracted his first year in college nearly killed him. His gastrointestinal tract never recovered from the amoebic dysentery he picked up as a twenty-year-old traveling in Italy. He self-diagnosed many of his illnesses as partly psychosomatic. In an informal medical autobiography, he explained that every month or so he suffered from herpes zoster, "preceded, as a rule by a spell of depression, irritability, and sometimes gastro-intestinal discomfort." Ulcers afflicted him throughout his years of service in the State Department. Beginning in 1963, he endured a painful kidney stone. He contracted hepatitis in 1964. In 1966, a "very gnarled, but not cancerous" prostate gland was removed. He had a heart murmur and increasingly painful arthritis in his knees.[47]

Keeping tabs on these physical and psychological ailments was Dr. Frieda Por, a key figure in Kennan's life. She was the Jewish Hungarian doctor who had restored him to health at the Gutenbrunn sanatorium outside Vienna after his December 1934 breakdown in Moscow. A Freudian-minded physician who stressed diet and a holistic approach to a healthy body and mind, Por became the Kennan family doctor after George helped her emigrate to the United States in 1938. They corresponded frequently, he detailing his activities as well as physical and emotional symptoms, and she prescribing remedies and tests for her

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"MIP (Most Important Patient)." As Grace observed of her father, Dr. Por "penetrated under his skin as no one else did."[48]

In June 1977, after two weeks of relative relaxation and beautiful weather at the summer home in Kristiansand, Kennan complained to his doctor that aside from the grating of the kidney stone, he suffered "intestinal abnormalities and great tiredness through much of the day." Nevertheless, "I force myself to do two to three hours of stiff physical work daily." Por recommended tests to discover the cause of the tiredness. Though he had not done the tests, he felt rejuvenated by a sailing trip in rough seas to Denmark and back. He proudly detailed how he had been able to "rise at 3:30 A.M., after only 4–5 hours of sleep . . . sail 15 hours straight in beastly weather," eating only a few biscuits and a cup of soup "consumed in the heaving cockpit, with the spray and rain flying—one hand holding on to the cup, the other to the boat," soaked to the skin and all the while wondering "how one is ever to find one's way to a safe place on some shore." He could endure such trials because of the "mysterious effect of challenge and danger" upon the body and the psyche.[49] The ordeal was exhilarating also because it unleashed, as George and Frieda both believed, the creative forces of Eros.

After giving an elaborately formal address in Germany, Kennan again informed Por that he feared a major problem: "liver, gall bladder, bile duct, or what?" From a distance Dr. Por diagnosed lingering worry over his big speech. She prescribed Valium, "an excellent relaxant without being a dope." The patient acknowledged that the "intestinal spasms" were, "as you say, no doubt of psycho-somatic origins." He then listed the ailments: kidney stone, heart murmur, arthritic knees, and tendency to forget names. A problem they had evidently often discussed, "his eye for feminine beauty," had "unfortunately not been dimmed."

While Kennan feared living into old age would reduce him to a "slobbering old vegetable," he endured, despite or maybe because of the hypochondria, until 2005.[50] Nearing 100, he continued campaigning against NATO expansion, which he feared threatened a renewed Cold War, and against the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq, which he condemned as yet another doomed and unnecessary intervention.

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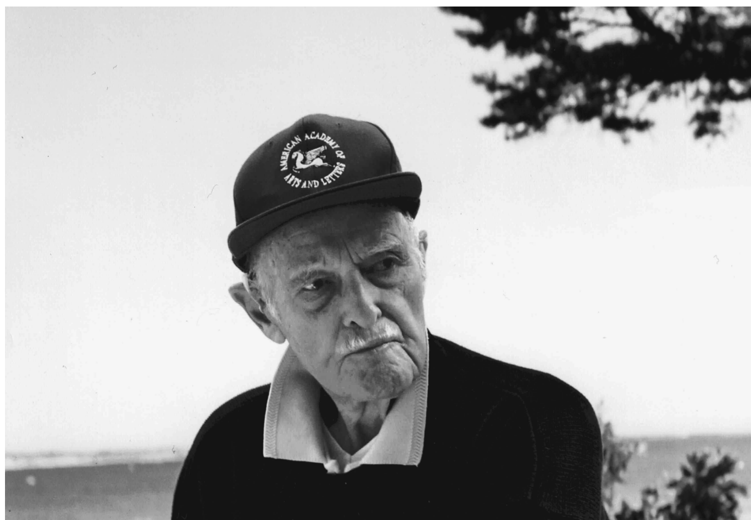

FIGURE 2. As he aged, Kennan grew even more passionate about nature, especially the waters around the family's summer home near Kristiansand, Norway. (Courtesy of Grace Kennan Warnecke.)

At stake in investigating the inner life of George F. Kennan is understanding the tortured, talented, and ultimately tragic individual who helped instigate the Cold War and then worked unceasingly to end it. While Kennan's ambitions exceeded his abilities, those talents remained extraordinary. A diarist as discerning and elegant as John Quincy Adams, Kennan also ranked with Adams as a perceptive strategist of U.S. foreign policy. Adams and Kennan both understood that for the self-righteous American behemoth, exercising restraint in foreign involvement could pose more of a challenge than exercising power. Kennan liked to quote Adams's famous July 4, 1821, peroration that "America goes not abroad in search of monsters to destroy." In 1946–1947, Kennan painted a portrait of a monster that he thought should be contained, not destroyed. Yet, tragically, he blazoned the beast with such vivid imagery that Americans assumed they had to destroy it. Appalled at the

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consequences of his scaremongering, Kennan then spent a half century trying to subdue the alarm he had helped provoke.

Kennan shared with John Quincy Adams's grandson, Henry Adams, skepticism about industrialization and admiration for an agrarian republic. They had little truck with the ideological conceits, inflated self-esteem, and worship of commerce that characterized their countrymen. And they shared an ironic, detached style. Although Kennan respected Adams's warning about the force of the dynamo in modern times, his environmentalist critique of technology and the machine had a largely Russian origin. He took to heart Anton Chekhov's view that industrial production amounted to a tragic misunderstanding of how human beings should relate to each other and to nature.

Also like Henry Adams, Kennan felt abandoned in the wrong century. His upbringing reflected the paternal influence of a father born in the middle of the nineteenth century who clung to the habits of an earlier era. On his maternal side, the larger-than-life image of his grandfather, Alfred James, who returned from his swashbuckling, high-seas adventures around the world to build a successful insurance company, also anchored George to an earlier time. Reared with stories of his grandfather, George as a young boy dreamed of going not to Russia, but to sea. The grandfather shone also for having apparently achieved the balance between creativity and order to which the grandson would aspire.

Kennan's distance from the twentieth century afforded him the independence of mind to see beyond the ideological struggle between communism and capitalism that preoccupied most strategists in the half century following World War II. Particularly because he had witnessed Stalinist repression firsthand during the purges of the late 1930s, Kennan hated the Kremlin's hold over the Russian people and its dominance in Eastern Europe. He believed the solution was: first, contain Soviet expansion; then, negotiate a mutual U.S.-Soviet pullback from Germany and the rest of Europe.

Eventually, he predicted, a contained Soviet Union would mellow or even collapse. As early as 1948, Kennan saw possibilities for serious diplomacy with Moscow. Partly because he empathized with the Russian people, he could not help but see international issues also from

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the perspective of Soviet leaders, regardless of how offensive he regarded their rule. Thus positioned between America and Russia, Kennan repeatedly discerned opportunities for negotiation, particularly to settle the explosive issues of Germany and nuclear weapons. Kennan's Cold War should be understood as a contingent struggle, a conflict surely real and dangerous, but also amenable to easing through determined diplomacy, of which there was little after 1945. Attuned to his own emotional sensibilities, Kennan understood the impact of feelings on international relations, especially with regard to demonstrations of pride and respect.

Kennan's lesson for us, in understanding the Cold War of the twentieth century and in defusing the explosive tensions of the twenty-first century, is that seemingly intractable conflicts may be more susceptible to settlement than it may at first appear. As Kennan put it, sharply opposed positions are just the asking price in the long, necessarily patient process of diplomacy. Kennan would have argued that peace in the twenty-first century requires accepting that Russia, like the United States, has legitimate national interests and, because it indulges in notions of an expansive national mission, it needs to be checked through diplomacy and a balance of power.

Kennan's alienation from his own era and country afforded unique insights, some piercingly perceptive and others just bizarre. Love for Russia wracked his equilibrium while extending his vision. The America that he loved existed, if at all, before his time. In failing miserably at restoring this lost idyll, he offered, ironically, some lessons for postindustrial, postpandemic American society. Throughout his life, Kennan championed physical as well as mental labor, personal rather than anonymous or machine interactions, local sourcing, small farms, other small enterprises, backyard ventures, environmental cleanup, crafting and building things, hand tools, small-scale everything, trains rather than planes and cars, and the arts and technologies lost with the hegemony of the internal combustion engine. While Kennan probably would not feel at home in our era, we could learn much from him.

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