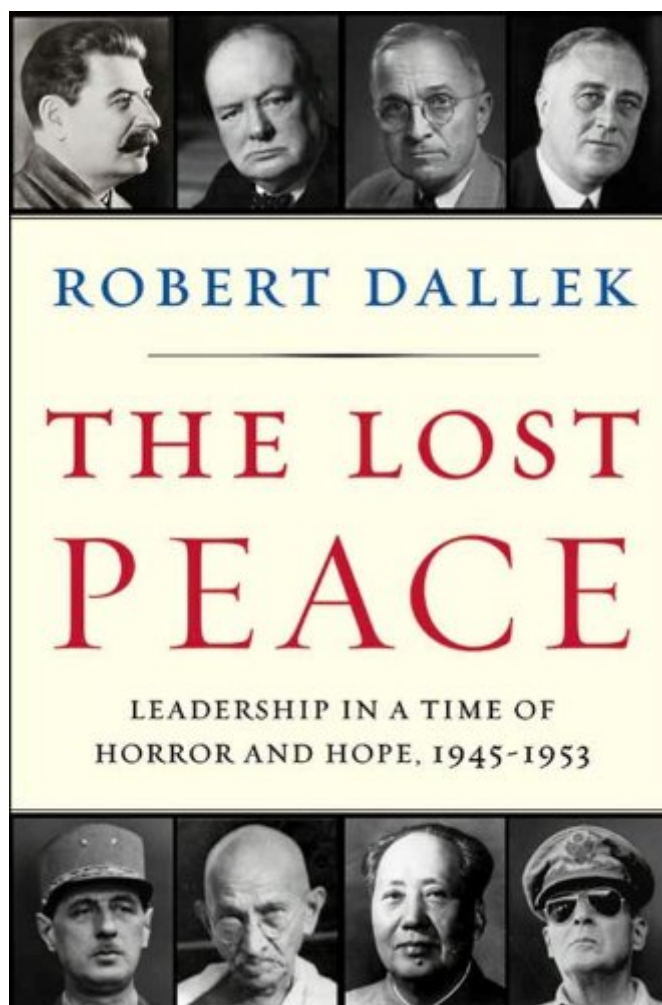


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The Lost Peace: Leadership In A Time Of Horror And Hope, 1945-1953



Synopsis

"Robert Dallek brings to this majestic work a profound understanding of history, a deep engagement in foreign policy, and a lifetime of studying leadership. The story of what went wrong during the postwar period has never been more intelligently explored." —Doris Kearns Goodwin, author of the Pulitzer Prize-winning *Team of Rivals* Robert Dallek follows his bestselling *Nixon and Kissinger: Partners in Power* and *An Unfinished Life: John F. Kennedy, 1917-1963* with this masterful account of the crucial period that shaped the postwar world. As the Obama Administration struggles to define its strategy for the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, Dallek's critical and compelling look at Truman, Churchill, Stalin, and other world leaders in the wake of World War II not only offers important historical perspective but provides timely insight on America's course into the future.

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Customer Reviews

This is a very fine book by a first-rate historian that covers the critical period in which the Cold War began. It is easily one of the best works available on the topic, but it does have some weaknesses in terms of Dallek's tendency on some occasions to fall back on mythology rather than draw the

proper conclusions from his facts. For example, he provides one example after the next of Harry Truman's fierce anti-Soviet bias and his dubious decisions in dealing with Stalin and other world leaders, yet he buys into the myth of Truman as the common-man-turned-President who did a solid job despite his lack of education or preparation for leading the nation. Likewise, Dallek is much harder on Stalin than the Soviet dictator deserves. Stalin was a cruel and ruthless man who certainly was far more of a villain than a hero, but he also managed to get his country through World War Two at a time when none of his allies were offering much help. FDR had promised to open a "second front" by invading France in 1942, but did not get around to keeping that promise for two additional years while the Russians bore the brunt of the fight against Hitler -- something FDR readily admitted and was embarrassed by. Dallek keeps scolding Stalin for being so unwilling to trust the U.S. and England but does not make it clear to the reader that that mistrust had a long and justified history. In general, Stalin tended to break all the rules within his own country, but was careful to keep his word on the international scene, which was why FDR was confident he could deal with him in the postwar period. Truman, with his simplistic frame of mind, could not understand that and, as a result, was probably even more responsible than Stalin for bringing about the Cold War. These are significant flaws, but then Dallek, on balance, does better than most writers in handling this subject and on that basis I would not hesitate to recommend this book highly. However, readers should be aware of the need to draw the appropriate conclusions from the evidence Dallek amply provides even when he shies away from doing so himself.

"Let us pray that peace be now restored to the world and that God will preserve it always." So prayed Gen. Douglas MacArthur at the surrender ceremony aboard the U. S. S. Missouri but the hope for peace swiftly foundered amidst the barely suppressed distrust and hostility among the Soviet Union and its erstwhile allies. Was peace possible? Was the Cold, sometimes hot, War, an inevitable consequence of the world situation or could it have been averted? Whose actions, suspicions and miscalculations squandered the opportunity? Robert Dallek's "The Lost Peace" seeks to explore these and other questions. The story began not in Tokyo Bay but in the closing days of World War II and Roosevelt, Stalin and Churchill divided up the post-war world. In fact the ground work is laid long before that with biographical surveys of those three giants of history as well as Harry Truman who would replace FDR. Shortly it would be Harry and "Uncle Joe" who would set the tone for the post-war world. Truman entered the scene as the protégé of Boss Tom Pendergast who came out of nowhere, although he was not as unqualified as many presumed. He had something to prove to Stalin, Churchill, and himself, that he could fill the shoes of the great

Roosevelt, could defend American interests and still pursue the dreamed for peace. His experience with Stalin would soon lead to an intense distrust that would set the tone for forty years. Stalin expressed his condolences on Roosevelt's death by describing him as "a great statesman, a clever educated, far-sighted and liberal leader who prolonged the life of capitalism." After meeting Truman at Potsdam he said "They couldn't be compared. Truman's neither educated nor clever." While at Potsdam Truman learned of the successful test of the atomic bomb. He had to make the decision to use it and how much to tell the Soviets. The possession of the bomb became a crucial factor in great power politics with the U. S. and U.S.S.R. seeing it as creating an unequal negotiating position that was exploited by the Americans and caused apprehension among the Russians. Dallek takes the reader through the events and personalities that shaped the years between the end of World War II and the advent of the Eisenhower administration. Churchill gave his Iron Curtain speech, MacArthur fought brilliantly and overstepped his authority tragically, George Marshall gave his name to the plan that saved Europe from Communism, Joseph McCarthy raised the level of the Red Menace, Kim Il Sung, Sygman Rhee and Mao made high stakes advances and bluffs in Korea, all the while Harry and Joe managed their domestic politics as they competed on the world stage. By the end of the book Stalin was dead, Truman discredited and out of office and it remained for their successors to bring peace to Korea and manage East-West rivalry by other means. Their legacies would guide and shape the terms of John Kennedy, Lyndon Johnson and both Bushes. This book is revisionist history in that it does not adhere to the normal legend of the military alliances that contained Communism and preserved freedom. It raises the queries of whether a more cooperative attitude at Potsdam might have gotten things to a better start, whether defending Korea, and advancing into North Korea were really good ideas and whether establishing NATO forced a responsive Warsaw Pact that held Europe in a hair-trigger grid-lock for decades. Stalin's miscalculations are not over looked, particularly his idea that the Korean War would prevent a U.S. build-up in Europe when that is exactly what occurred. Dallek draws heavily on the writings and thoughts of Soviet expert George Keenan who seems to have believed that a less confrontational approach to the Soviets might have avoided some of the unpleasantness of that era. "The Lost Peace" is an excellent and helpful study of an important but often over looked era.

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