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**Decision Making in the Grey Zone: Lessons from Truman, Eisenhower,
and the Development of Nuclear Strategy**

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and the Development of Nuclear Strategy**

by

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Dedication

Dedicated to my loving, caring, and ever patient wife, Morgen.

Abstract

Decision Making in the Grey Zone: Lessons from Truman, Eisenhower, and the Development of Nuclear Strategy

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The character of modern conflict is changing. The foundations of the international system are shifting as near peer adversaries, regionally destabilizing revisionists, and global networks of terror and crime mix in an environment awash in new technology. Unfortunately, the strategic paradigms that have defined U.S. policy since 1945 are inadequate in the face of this new reality. The focus of this study is not the creation of a new paradigm; instead, it seeks to define the contours of strategic decision-making that best serve the modern moment. Seeking such a model, I analyze the assumptions and processes at play in the creation of nuclear strategy during the Truman and Eisenhower administrations. Their approaches to the new strategic reality that nuclear weapons introduced were quite different, and the lessons those differences provide are instructive for today.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

MODERN STRATEGIC CONTEXT

The modern global strategic context is the most complicated and challenging the United States has been forced to confront since late 1945. The Cold War was uniquely dangerous, but there was strategic benefit to a singular adversarial focus. Today, real and potential threats to American hegemony and the international status-quo it leads are diverse.

While still Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Martin Dempsey would describe the world using a framework of two ‘heavy weights,’ two ‘middle weights,’ and two networks. The ‘heavy weights’ – Russia and China – are the adversaries capable of responding across the full spectrum of conflict. Iran and the North Korea are the ‘middle weights.’ Neither pose an immediate or existential threat to the U.S., but each as the power to radically disrupt regional power dynamics. They both also have interest in and the nascent capability of developing nuclear weapons. Finally, the two networks consist of transnational organized crime and international terrorism – threats that transcend borders and undermine American interests through illicit economic, political, and violent means.¹ Though it is a simplification, Dempsey’s framework highlights the disparate challenges of the modern strategic environment; threats and opportunities span regions and military domains.

One factor is missing, though. Throughout the latter Twentieth Century, the U.S. benefited from significant technological offset. Apart from the Soviet Union, no potential adversary – state or otherwise – could match the American national security apparatus. The

¹ Atlantic Council., “Transcript: Gen. Martin Dempsey at Disrupting Defense,” May 14, 2014, <http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/news/transcripts/transcript-gen-martin-dempsey-at-disrupting-defense>.

same cannot be said today for several reasons. First, technology is rapidly changing. In many cases, by the time a new capability is ideated, tested, fielded, and scaled it is no longer useful.² Second, there are few capabilities still reserved only for wealthy nation states. The costs associated with the development and maintenance of nuclear, mechanized, and air capabilities are high. However, modern technology is not so difficult to obtain and use. Publically available encryption, inexpensive unmanned aerial vehicles, and creative improvised explosive devices (IEDs) are just a few examples. Expanded access highlights a third point: smaller, less expensive technology can have strategic impact. Compare the average cost of a pressure triggered IED – \$416³ – to the \$1 Million price tag for each Mine Resistant, Ambush Protected (MRAP) sent to Iraq and Afghanistan.⁴

This new strategic reality is multidimensional. Threats and policy responses span regions, domains, and capabilities. Counterterror operations have occurred in countries as varied as Pakistan, Yemen, Indonesia, and Nigeria. The American Navy has deployed to project power into the South China Sea, and NATO has organized exercises in response to Russian aggression in Eastern Europe. Tactics have also been varied. The war in Afghanistan began in 2001 with the clandestine infiltration of intelligence professionals and special operators, while the 2003 invasion of Iraq saw a much more conventional, mechanized approach. Exacerbating this complexity is the fact that various threats intersect

² Two factors drive this fact. One, cyber capabilities are now integral to national security and defense capabilities. By their nature and due to their relative ‘infancy,’ a new capability often makes previous iterations obsolete the moment it is fielded. Two, the defense acquisition system is slow, if it works at all. There is a reason efforts like the Strategic Capabilities Office (SCO) and the Defense Innovation Unit Experimental (DIUx) work around the system rather than within it.

³ Tom Vanden Brook, “Afghan IEDS: Warfare on the Cheap,” *USA Today*, June 24, 2013, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/nation/2013/06/24/price-list-for-ieds-shows-how-insurgents-fight-on-a-budget/2447471/>.

⁴ Alex Rogers, “The MRAP: Brilliant Buy, or Billions Wasted?” *TIME*, October 2, 2012., <http://nation.time.com/2012/10/02/the-mrap-brilliant-buy-or-billions-wasted/>.

in ways not previously seen. The ongoing war in Syria represents a case of counterterrorism, hegemonic statecraft, civil war, humanitarian need, and sectarian violence overlapping on the same battlefield awash in new, changing technology.

GREY ZONE DECISION MAKING

The strategic moment at the end of the World War II was less complex. There was a singular adversarial focus – the Soviet Union – and the spectrum of potential conflict was limited. Combined, demobilization and a focus on the domestic economy left nuclear backed diplomacy as the only real option available to the U.S. On one extreme was the threat of nuclear conflict; on the other was the diplomatic and economic corps. There were no real strategic policy options left in the middle. This fact made the crafting of foreign policy more difficult, but it was a simpler proposition. In response, violent conflict and diplomatic competition – on their relative extremes – have been well considered.

Yet, during the Cold War, it was fairly easy to mark a line between war and peace. The variety of modern challenges described already offer no such luxury; they exist in the space between – what the defense industry has come to call the *grey zone*. Multidimensional and intersectional threats are made worse by state actors behaving as non-state actors (i.e. Russian incursion into Crimea), non-state actors seeking the legitimacy of the state (i.e. the Islamic State). Individual aspects of the grey zone have been considered at length; counterterrorism and counterinsurgency are but two examples. But, due to the scope of the grey zone, there is little scholarship that considers its entirety. Grey zone conflicts are not entirely new and they are not the only options for future conflict, but given the current global environment and the trends beginning to shape the future, this gap

is dangerous. The primary focus of the American military is likely to be grey zone activities rather than the conventional wars of the past. Therefore, three things are necessary.

First, the full spectrum of conflict needs to be more clearly defined. The space between war and peace is not empty; it is a landscape churning with political, economic, and security competitions that require constant attention. An inability to define the modern conflict spectrum predicates an inability to effectively wage war, as it is now includes more than the conventional fight. The likely strategic consequence will be a failure to craft tailored foreign policy, reducing the options to a reactive, conventional military approach.⁵

Second, a normative decision making model is needed. With a proper understanding of the full spectrum of conflict in mind, the next most pressing issue of the grey zone is the ability to identify, understand, and strategically plan for both threats and opportunities. But, again, the literature available is lacking a normative, grey-zone-wide approach. While decision-making in diplomacy and during wartime are different, modern decision-makers must have the processes and tools to integrate them.

Finally, flexible policy tools must be available. This is likely to be the most challenging aspect of planning for the grey-zone. It might be preferable to create a policy tool for every contingency, but the diversity of threats will run into the limitations of budgets. Fundamentally though, correct understanding, proper process, and effective strategic concepts are only useful if the tools of implementation are on hand.

⁵ Speaking before Congress, Admiral William McRaven, then SOCCOM Commander, highlighted the importance of changing the paradigm away from a conventional focus: “However, the direct approach alone is not the solution to the challenges our Nation faces today as it ultimately only buys time and space for the indirect approach and broader governmental elements to take effect. Less well known but decisive in importance, the indirect approach is the complementary element that can counter the systemic components of the threat.” (William McRaven, Statement to the U.S. Senate, Committee on Armed Services, *Posture Statement, Special Operations Command*, Hearing, March 6, 2012. Available at: <https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/McRaven%2003-06-12.pdf>.)

SCOPE AND CASE SELECTION

The first requirement – better understanding – has been considered inside and outside of government. There continues to be debate at the margins, but the national security establishment has come to a consensus about what the grey zone includes.^{6 7 8} That said, strategic concepts drive force structure decisions. Flexible policy tools first require an integrative, normative decision-making model. Therefore, this study seeks to address the second issue – decision-making.

Given the complexity and novelty of the modern strategic context, there are no direct historical analogs. But, there are past examples of decision-makers grappling with new areas within the spectrum of conflict. Between 1945 and 1960, the United States was forced to confront a near peer adversary (the Soviet Union) and less existential threats (Korea, China, Iran, etc.) in a global environment whose foundations were shifting and with new but transferable technology (nuclear weapons). The boundaries were expanded with the introduction of atomic weapons, and Truman’s task was determining how these new weapons fit into the existing mold. Eisenhower then sought to push the nuclear lessons back down to the conventional military level.

⁶ Joseph Votel. Statement to the United States House, Committee on Armed Services, Subcommittee on Emerging Threats and Capacities. *Statement, Commander, Special Operations Command*, Hearing, March 18, 2015. Available at: <http://docs.house.gov/meetings/AS/AS26/20150318/103157/HMTG-114-AS26-Wstate-VotelUSAJ-20150318.pdf>.

⁷ Frank Hoffman, “The Contemporary Spectrum of Conflict: Protracted, Gray Zone, Ambiguous, and Hybrid Modes of War,” 2015 Index of U.S. Military Strength., Washington DC: Heritage Foundation, n.d. https://s3.amazonaws.com/ims-2016/PDF/2016_Index_of_US_Military_Strength_ESSAYS_HOFFMAN.pdf.

⁸ Philip Kapusta, 2015, “The Gray Zone,” U.S. Special Operations Command, September 9, <https://army.com/sites/army.com/files/Gray%20Zones%20-%20USSOCOM%20White%20Paper%209%20Sep%202015.pdf>.

It is not a perfect analog, but the lessons are still instructive. Consequently, the focus of this study will be the differences that led the Truman and Eisenhower administrations to their conclusions and recommendations for U.S. nuclear policy.

[Because this study is more interested in process than content, the sources used are primarily secondary histories supplemented by primary references where appropriate.]

CHAPTER 2: THE TRUMAN ADMINISTRATION

Fred Kaplan begins his book *The Wizards of Armageddon* with a story about Bernard Brodie. Already a standout naval strategist, Brodie was serving on the Yale University political science faculty on August 7, 1945. In that morning's paper, he saw the news that the United States had dropped an atomic bomb on Japan: "Brodie read just two paragraphs of the story that followed, looked up for a few seconds, turned to his wife and said, 'Everything that I have written is obsolete.'"⁹

The instantaneous destructive capability of this weapon upended the whole concept of warfare and its place in the international system. Diplomacy and warfare had followed certain rules for much of modern history, but those rules and their underlying assumptions changed. However, apart from a handful of defense intellectuals like Brodie, realizing this new moment took time: "...it did not change suddenly. The Cold War set in by stages, like the changing of the seasons."¹⁰

In fact, the broader story of Truman's response is one of old concepts applied to a new world. The spectrum of conflict was expanded to include nuclear weapons, and the strategic imperative was to determine how these new weapons fit into the existing world order. Yet, when looking to the administration's notion of relative power, their early attempts at crafting international atomic energy controls, and the shoehorning of nuclear weapons into existing military doctrine and organizational structure the lack of strategic imagination is evident.

⁹ Fred Kaplan, *The Wizards of Armageddon* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1983), 9-10.

¹⁰ Michael Mandelbaum, *The Nuclear Question: The United States and Nuclear Weapons, 1946-1976* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 43.

POST-WAR INTERNATIONAL POWER

Paul Kennedy, in *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, claims, “The relative strengths of the leading nations in world affairs never remain constant, principally because of the uneven rate of growth among different societies and of the technological and organizational breakthroughs which bring a greater advantage to one society than to another.”¹¹ His argument is that the power of states is determined by access to resources and economic stability. Thus, the ability to project power and make war is found in the ability to mobilize those resources and a robust economy.

After World War II, the United States was the only country with such a combination. The rest of the world was in varying degrees of ruin. Combat had taken more than fifty million lives, with disease, famine, and displacement killing millions more. Infrastructure was ruined, transportation non-existent, and agricultural reserves gone. Even for the victorious Allies, reconstruction would be a long process. Countries simply could not provide everything their countrymen needed as fast as they needed it.

The U.S. was in a better situation. Other than the attacks on Pearl Harbor, the war did not touch the American homeland. Nearly 400,000 Americans were killed during the war, but the wholesale upheaval did not cross the Atlantic with those caskets. The country emerged from the war richer and stronger than it had been before. The American economy, already comparatively productive, thrived during the war. Industry remained intact and turned out massive stockpiles of military hardware. Some was sold to allied governments – to the tune of \$37.5 billion – but much of it was used to increase U.S. military power. By the end of the war, no country could match the American air force or navy. There was also

¹¹ Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000* (New York: Vintage Books, 1987), xv.

the benefit of a nuclear monopoly. This combination is what Melvyn Leffler has called a preponderance of power.¹²

American policymakers recognized this unique moment. Senior personnel in the Roosevelt and Truman administrations had watched President Wilson fail in the creation of a safer, more peaceful world. For all its good intentions, the fight over the League of Nations squandered an opportunity and American officials were hell-bent on avoiding Wilson's mistakes:

For many officials, businessmen, and publicists, victory confirmed the superiority of American values: individual liberty, representative government, free enterprise, private property, and a marketplace economy. Given their country's overwhelming power, they now expected to refashion the world in America's image and create the American century.¹³

While this reads ideologically, there was a real belief that the projection of American values created an international environment that would keep the U.S. safe. National security meant more than defending territory; it meant the preservation of an international order that allowed continued access to resources and markets, and prevented any adversary from disrupting the system. Therefore, the U.S. took on a hegemonic role. International community (the United Nations) and multilateral economic integration (the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank) were designed as much to prevent adversaries from easily obtaining war making resources as they were to promote democracy, human rights, and free markets. This was not an attempt to dominate every facet of the global system. Instead, the focus was on Kennedy's conception of relative power – resource access and economic stability. Thus, Truman and his advisors believed

¹² Melvyn P Leffler, *A Preponderance of Power: National Security, the Truman Administration, and the Cold War*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), 2.

¹³ Leffler, *A Preponderance of Power*, 3.

that a combination of economic hegemony and air power, backstopped by nuclear weapons, would be enough to keep the U.S. safe and thwart any adversary.

This preponderant moment was not one of profound confidence, though. After Hitler's invasion of the Soviet Union stalled outside Moscow in 1941,¹⁴ the Red Army methodically marched westward. Their counteroffensives in 1941 and 1942 were slow going^{15 16} and the Battle for Stalingrad was a six-month stalemate,¹⁷ but the sweep across Eastern Europe in 1943 and 1944^{18 19 20} were integral to turning the tide of the war against the Germans. This military might was not wholly diminished after the war. Even considering Soviet losses and demobilization, the Red Army was still the largest standing army in the world. However, with the atomic bomb in hand, it was not the military strength of the Soviet Union that was of immediate concern for the U.S.

During and after the war, American officials saw Soviet territorial expansion as a threat to U.S. security. The U.S. was the only state with the combination of resources and

¹⁴ “Map 20: Advance on Moscow, 26 August – 5 December 1941.” *Atlases, Department of History, United States Military Academy*, n.d.

<http://www.usma.edu/history/SiteAssets/SitePages/World%20War%20II%20Europe/WWIIEurope20.gif>

¹⁵ “Map 21: Soviet Winter Offensive, 5 December 1941 – 7 May 1942.” *Atlases, Department of History, United States Military Academy*, n.d.

<http://www.usma.edu/history/SiteAssets/SitePages/World%20War%20II%20Europe/WWIIEurope20.gif>

¹⁶ “Map 25: Soviet Winter Offensive, 13 December 1942 – 18 February 1943.” *Atlases, Department of History, United States Military Academy*, n.d.

<http://www.usma.edu/history/SiteAssets/SitePages/World%20War%20II%20Europe/WWIIEurope25.gif>

¹⁷ “Map 23b: Stalingrad and Vicinity, 1942.” *Atlases, Department of History, United States Military Academy*, n.d.

<http://www.usma.edu/history/SiteAssets/SitePages/World%20War%20II%20Europe/WWIIEurope23b.gif>

¹⁸ “Map 30: Operation Bagration.” *Atlases, Department of History, United States Military Academy*, n.d.

<http://www.usma.edu/history/SiteAssets/SitePages/World%20War%20II%20Europe/WWIIEurope30.gif>

¹⁹ “Map 29: Russian Leningrad and Ukraine Offensives, 2 December 1943 – 30 April 1944.” *Atlases, Department of History, United States Military Academy*, n.d.

<http://www.usma.edu/history/SiteAssets/SitePages/World%20War%20II%20Europe/WWIIEurope29.gif>

²⁰ “Map 31: Russian Balkan and Baltic Campaigns, 10 August 1943 – 31 December 1944.” *Atlases, Department of History, United States Military Academy*, n.d.

<http://www.usma.edu/history/SiteAssets/SitePages/World%20War%20II%20Europe/WWIIEurope31.gif>

economic stability needed to maintain and project power, but it needed time to cement an international system that secured American power. In the areas that mattered – infrastructure, resource access, and technology – the USSR was weak, but it was poised to seize the opportunity to expand.

During their military offensives, the Soviets had occupied a great deal of land that they had no intention of returning after the war. Part of this was strategically practical. For centuries, Russia had been the target of invasions from the west, so the establishment of outright control and satellite states created buffer space. Part was ideological. Memories of imperial grandeur under the rules of Peter the Great and Catherine the Great motivated a return to such a position of power.²¹ And part was personal. By the end of the war, Joseph Stalin was wary of Allied intentions after the war. President Roosevelt at Yalta and President Truman at Potsdam soothed these concerns by granting Soviet control and influence over much of Eastern Europe. The Soviets were critically important in the war against Germany and Japan, but such an accession proved strategically problematic.

Two important factors perpetuated American concern. First, there was no substantive military deterrent anywhere in Eurasia. With its overseas commitments declining, even the American atomic bomb would take time to deploy. There was little more than nuclear threats and diplomacy preventing the Soviets from expanding further. Second, communism was spreading across Europe after the war. While there are ideological differences between communism and American capitalism, the major concern was of a security relationship grounded in ideological agreement.

Many believed that President Roosevelt had been too generous in his relationship with Stalin, and now was the time for a harder line. This sentiment motivated a 1945

²¹ See Peter Massie, *Peter the Great: His Life and World*, (New York: Random House, 1981); *Catherine the Great: Portrait of a Woman*, (New York: Random House, 2012).

Brookings Institution study entitled “A Security Policy for Postwar America.” The report concluded that control of Eurasia was the key to modern geopolitics:

Since there is scant evidence that the United States or the whole New World, could successfully withstand attack by a power which first subdued the world of Europe or Eurasia, it must be the continuous concern of American statesmen to prevent a new Napoleon or a new Hitler from arising. Twice within a generation this has brought the United States into a global conflict.²²

Therefore, the Soviet Union needed to be contained.²³ For the authors, operating on good faith was not enough – “The day when the United States can take ‘a free ride’ in security is over.”²⁴ The United States would need to be actively engaged, politically and economically, in the prevention of Soviet expansion.

William Donovan, director of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), came to the same conclusion. His 1945 report to President Truman began with an assessment of the situation in Europe and Asia. An Eastern Europe “racked by war and suffering widespread misery” was being overrun by the Russian army and turning to communism. The U.S. had “not political or social philosophy equally dynamic or alluring.” Asia was no better. The defeat of Japan would strengthen the Soviets, and “if we adopt a hands-off policy, Russia may very well succeed in organizing China as an effective ally of Moscow.” Donovan assessed that the Soviets would avoid war in the short term and believed that such a delay called for “clear, firm, and thoroughly non-provocative” American action.²⁵

²² “A Security Policy for Postwar America.” *Brookings Institution*, March 8, 1945. <http://rockefeller100.org/files/original/9218290cc292b6d5bc72aa71f1bb3144.pdf>.

²³ This idea might have predated the end of the war. Gar Alperovitz’s critique of the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki centers on the argument that the bomb was designed more as a strategic signal to the Soviets and a war ender for Japan. (Gar Alperovitz, *The Decision to Use the Atomic Bomb and the Architecture of an American Myth*, (New York: Alfred A Knopf, Inc., 1995).)

²⁴ Kaplan, *The Wizards of Armageddon*, 22.

²⁵ Leffler, *A Preponderance of Power*, 60-61.

The focus of these reports illustrates a disconnect in post-war America. Policymakers believed that the U.S. was experiencing a moment of unique power, and that its power was born from a stable and prosperous economy. This belief was decidedly nonmilitary. George Kennan's *Long Telegram*, one of the most important documents of the early Cold War, is an ideal example. The eight-thousand-word report fails to mention nuclear weapons, and it goes on to argue that military action was likely unnecessary: "...I would like to record my conviction that problem is within our power to solve and that without recourse to any general military conflict."²⁶

Conversely, strategists like Bernard Brodie were arguing that the global strategic environment had radically changed with the introduction of nuclear weapons. The assumption that power is an economic product was objectively wrong, but it needed to be reevaluated; the bomb changed the basic calculus of international power. Yet, the reports the President considered in 1945 and 1946 failed to consider this new reality. Given the role the bomb would play in the years to come, this failure to reevaluate basic assumptions would prove problematic.

TRUMAN'S DIPLOMATIC CHALLENGES

At the end of the war, the American military began the process of demobilization. The original plans, crafted in 1942,²⁷ were quickly scrapped as the troops and an anxious public pushed for a faster process. So, in less than two years (September 1945 – June 1947),

²⁶ "Telegram, George Kennan to George Marshall," February 22, 1946, Harry S. Truman Administration File, Elsey Papers, https://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study_collections/coldwar/documents/pdf/6-6.pdf.

²⁷ John Sparrow, *History of Personnel Demobilization in the United States Army (Department of the Army Pamphlet No. 20-210)*, (Washington DC: Department of the Army, 1952), http://www.history.army.mil/html/books/104/104-8/CMH_Pub_104-8.pdf.

the military decreased its forces by more than eighty percent.²⁸ This rapid reduction created a strategic problem. Of the twelve million troops serving at the time, more than seven million of them were stationed overseas. What remained – a bolstered air force and navy – were given the singular mission of munitions delivery. In effect, all conventional military deterrent was removed from Europe and Asia.

The result was a severely limited set of policy options. On one extreme was the diplomatic option; on the other was the nuclear option. Nothing substantive was in the middle.²⁹ Bernard Brodie captured this reality when he wrote, “...the fact remains that the atomic bomb is today our only means of throwing substantial power immediately against the Soviet Union in the event of flagrant Soviet aggression.”³⁰

Diplomatically, Truman faced several challenges. The death of President Roosevelt required a reset in the relationship with the USSR. Truman’s ideas were not out of step with Roosevelt’s, but his inexperience with the process, the issues, and with Stalin did cause strain. First, Truman was a true Presidential novice. He had been added to the 1944 ticket in what biographer Robert Ferrell called “a veritable conspiracy” against the sitting Vice President Henry Wallace.³¹ So, it is unsurprising that Roosevelt rarely confided in

²⁸ The American military was 12.3 million strong on the day Japan surrendered, but by 1947 that number was roughly 1.5 million. (Alton R. Lee, “The Army ‘Mutiny’ of 1946,” *The Journal of American History* 53, no. 3 (1966): 555-571, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1887571>; “Peace Becomes Cold War, 1945-1950,” in *American Military History*. Washington DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1989. <http://www.history.army.mil/books/AMH/AMH-24.htm>.)

²⁹ The official history of the Joint Chiefs of Staff argues that a conventional military option was unavailable: “The nature of modern warfare created a situation wherein a quantitative reduction within the armed forces produced a disproportionate qualitative reduction in the effectiveness of these forces. Any appreciate diminution in the numbers of men across the board created an imbalance in operating and support forces by eliminating key leaders, technicians, and specialists...A cut of 10 percent in numbers could lower the effectiveness of a unit by more than 50 percent.” (James F. Schnabel, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy: 1945-1947*, Vol. 1, (Washington DC: Office of Joint History, 1996), 98)

³⁰ Kaplan, *The Wizards of Armageddon*, 33

³¹ Robert H. Ferrell, *Harry S. Truman: A Life*, (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1994), 163; See also, Robert H. Ferrell, *Choosing Truman: The Democratic Convention of 1944*, (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1994), 163.

Truman after the election. This is not to say that their ideas were out of synch, but when the President died Truman had little experience on which to call.

Second, there were process concerns.³² Roosevelt had a notoriously loose decision-making process. When Cordell Hull resigned as Secretary of State in 1944, Roosevelt appointed Edward Stettinius as a place holder and served as his own informal Secretary of State. It was also a time of war and the President relied heavily on the advice of military and defense officials. The Department of War was made more powerful by the influence of Secretary of War Stimson and General George Marshall and its control of the Manhattan Project.³³ Thus, when Truman entered the presidency, he inherited weak and unbalanced policy process. Leffler notes, “Roosevelt had been able to sit at the pinnacle of this diffuse structure and use it to suit his administrative style. His successor viewed the set up as a morass. Truman did not know how to deal with the conflicting advice that came to him.”³⁴

Content to focus on domestic matters, the President ceded much of his foreign policy portfolio to his Secretary of State after the war. James Byrnes had experience but had process and expertise issues of his own. He was confident that he could leverage America’s nuclear capability as a deterrent in his negotiations with the Soviet Union, but he lacked a grounding in exactly how atomic diplomacy should work. To be fair, this was uncharted territory, but he “...never systemically pondered how [the bomb’s] military strengths could be translated into diplomatic leverage.”³⁵

³² For a lengthier discussion of Truman’s team, see Chapter 3, Patrick Anderson, *The President’s Men: White House Assistants of Franklin D. Roosevelt, Harry S. Truman, Dwight D. Eisenhower, John F. Kennedy, and Lyndon B. Johnson*, (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1968).

³³ Gar Alperovitz argues that the State Department was also shouldered out by Stimson to prevent the President from hearing a less hardline approach against the Soviets before Potsdam.

³⁴ Leffler, *A Preponderance of Power*, 30.

³⁵ Leffler, *A Preponderance of Power*, 39.

There were sweeping personnel changes, too. Secretary of War Stimson and his two deputies announced their resignations. After his first negotiations in London drew sharp criticism, Byrnes began to insulate himself by ignoring the professional diplomatic corps and firing key State Department staff. George Marshall also stepped aside after the war, replaced by Dwight Eisenhower. All of this created a state of policy chaos:

The squabbles between occupation authorities, the War Department, and the State Department were a microcosm of larger difficulties besetting Washington's policymaking community in the aftermath of war. In general, officials in the Pentagon believed that the nation's force structure, strategic concepts, military policies, and overseas base requirements had to uphold national objectives. But try as they might, they were unable to ascertain how the White House and the State Department were defining vital interests and security objectives. They, therefore, drew up their own objectives.³⁶

Truman's relationship with Stalin was a final diplomatic challenge. The Soviet leader was wary of U.S. post-war intentions, but Roosevelt had been able to foster a working relationship. Many felt Roosevelt was too accommodating, so the recommendations Truman received were mixed. The State Department and Joint Chiefs of Staff were ready to take a hard line, but Stimson was concerned about the consequences of an overly aggressive approach. Truman was optimistic about his chances to find a balance after meeting Stalin at Potsdam – "I can deal with Stalin. He is honest – but smart as hell."³⁷

³⁶ Leffler, *A Preponderance of Power*, 41,

³⁷ Barton J Bernstein, "Truman at Potsdam: His Secret Diary," *National Security Archive, George Washington University*, n.d., <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB162/38.pdf>.

ATTEMPTS AT INTERNATIONAL CONTROL

It is curious, then, that the first major effort Truman attempted on the nuclear issue required international diplomacy. In 1945, the United States was the only country with nuclear capabilities, and it was intent on using the bomb as leverage against the Soviets. However, Byrnes' first attempt at atomic diplomacy failed in London in September.³⁸ He proverbially carried the bomb "in his hip pocket," but it proved more of an obstacle than a useful tool.³⁹ Realizing there were not to be quick results, he feared that the situation would devolve into an arms race as soon as the Soviets could build their own nuclear weapon. The American monopoly would be short lived, if an alternative could not be found. So, Byrnes tasked Dean Acheson – Assistant Undersecretary of State – with the creation of a plan for international atomic energy control.⁴⁰ If the world could not be remade in a likeness that prevented proliferation, the U.S. wanted to ensure it oversaw all global atomic development.

Acheson assembled a committee and worked for two months on the issue.⁴¹ The final report, given to Byrnes in March 1946, called for the creation of an Atomic Development Authority (ADA) that would "control all supplies of uranium and thorium, manage the production of all fissionable products, and conduct all research in atomic explosives."⁴² It called for international control, which mitigated the need for a large

³⁸ If Alperovitz's argument is accepted, Byrnes' first failure at atomic diplomacy was actually in his advocacy for the bombing of Japan in an effort to send a strategic message to the Soviets. (See Gar Alperovitz, *The Decision to Use the Atomic Bomb*.)

³⁹ Gerard H. Clarefield, and William M. Wiecek, *Nuclear America: Military and Civilian Nuclear Power in the United States, 1940-1980* (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1984), 91.

⁴⁰ Acheson had also been key in getting the Atomic Energy Act of 1946 passed through Congress. See Clarefield and Wiecek, *Nuclear America*, 113-115; David S McLellan and David C. Acheson, eds, *Among Friends: Personal Letters of Dean Acheson* (New York: Dodd, Mead, & Company, 1980), 60-63.

⁴¹ See Dean Acheson, *Present at the Creation* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1969), 149-156; and McLellan, *Among Friends*, 77-84.

⁴² Leffler, *A Preponderance of Power*, 114.

inspection mechanism or sanctions.⁴³ But, to maintain a short-term U.S. nuclear monopoly, it required that all other nations – including the Soviet Union – abandon any domestic nuclear programs before the U.S. was required to make any concessions.⁴⁴

For a bruised diplomatic corps, the Acheson-Lilienthal Plan was a remarkable product. It balanced the desire to maintain U.S. nuclear monopoly with potential Soviet opposition. If pitched carefully, the plan would be an impressive diplomatic stroke. It was not to see fruition, though. Truman tasked Bernard Baruch – successful businessman and self-styled presidential advisor – with the implementation of the report at the United Nations Atomic Energy Commission (AEC). Baruch and his team accepted Acheson’s report, but by the time it was briefed at the AEC, important provisions were removed and it was much more aggressive than originally intended.

The changes undermined the most important aspects of the plan. First, rather than have international ownership of mines and plants – a concept Baruch found “dangerously socialistic”⁴⁵ ⁴⁶– the facilities would stay in state or private hands and be open to international inspection. Advocates of the Acheson-Lilienthal plan claimed that this eliminated the mechanism that was most likely to get the Soviets on board;⁴⁷ Baruch

⁴³ Arnold A. Offner, *Another Such Victory: President Truman and the Cold War, 1945-1953* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 145.

⁴⁴ Clarefield and Wiecek, *Nuclear America*, 92.

⁴⁵ Clarefield and Wiecek, *Nuclear America*, 96.

⁴⁶ For more of Baruch’s thinking on the matter, see Margaret L. Coit, *Mr. Baruch*. 2nd ed. (Cambridge: The Riverside Press, 1957), 560- 587.

⁴⁷ David Lilienthal wrote in his journal on 24 July 1946: “[Oppenheimer] is in deep despair about the way things are going in the negotiations in New York. He sees no hope of agreement; he doesn’t feel that our plan is understood by the American delegation, that Baruch’s preoccupation with ‘punishment’ and ‘veto’ had done great harm so that there is little or no discussion of the essentials of the plan.... It is difficult to record how profoundly hopeless...it is.” (69) For more on Lilienthal’s thoughts on the creation of the ADA plan and on Baruch’s implementation, see the entries from 31 May, 13 June, 14 June, 24 July, 11 January 1947, and 18 May 1953. (David Lilienthal, *The Journals of David E. Lilienthal: The Atomic Energy Years, 1945-1950*. 1st ed. (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1964); David Lilienthal, *The Journals of David E. Lilienthal: The Venturesome Years, 1950-1955*. 1st ed. (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1966).

ignored them.⁴⁸ Additionally, the AEC team stringently defended the position that the U.S. would not offer any concessions until all others ceded their entire nuclear program. President Truman emphasized the point: “We ‘should not under any circumstances throw away our gun until we are sure the rest of the world cannot arm against us.’”⁴⁹ Again, this all but guaranteed Soviet resistance. Though the UN Security Council endorsed the Baruch Plan (with Russian abstention), the proposal died a bureaucratic death three years later.⁵⁰

The Acheson-Lilienthal-Baruch situation highlights an important point. Atomic diplomacy was much more difficult than originally intended. It became clear that both Truman and Stalin saw nuclear weapons as spectacularly dangerous but not as a threat to humanity.⁵¹ During the Potsdam Conference in 1945, Truman wrote, “It seems to be the most terrible thing ever discovered, but it can be made the most useful.”⁵² The deterrent effect Byrnes believed the bomb would have in London would not be seen until the advent of the hydrogen bomb and mutually assured destruction. As Michael Mandelbaum aptly states, “The Baruch Plan helped to start the Cold War, for it collapsed at an important moment in the sequence of events that led from joined hands to drawn swords”⁵³

WHO’S IN CHARGE?

By autumn 1946, the Cold War had officially begun. The American public, Congress, and the Truman administration were in general agreement that the Soviet Union

⁴⁸ Baruch writes in his memoir, “If the threat of atomic war cannot be chained up, it is far better that we face it with wide open eyes than to be lulled into a false sense of security by some meaningless agreement.” (Bernard M. Baruch, *Baruch: My Own Story* (New York: Pocket Books, Inc., 1958), 296).

⁴⁹ Leffler, *A Preponderance of Power*, 115.

⁵⁰ Mandelbaum, *The Nuclear Question*, 25.

⁵¹ Offner, *Another Such Victory*, 151.

⁵² Bernstein, “Truman at Potsdam.”

⁵³ Mandelbaum, *The Nuclear Question*, 33.

was an ideological enemy that required both containment and nuclear deterrence; if the administration stayed in this lane, it was given wide policy latitude.⁵⁴ So, the debate over nuclear strategy moved inside the government.

Who would drive the creation of nuclear doctrine? Interestingly, this issue was not as contentious as would be expected. Early, those in the diplomatic and broadly defined foreign policy positions believed that nuclear weapons should only be a tool of broadly defined statecraft. Truman tended to agree, believing that the atomic bomb served more as a deterrent than an actual military tool. Only in a moment of extreme need and last resort would it be used – see the numerous accounts of Truman’s decision to use the bomb against Japan.

Yet, strategic planning was left primarily to the military for a few reasons. The first was a consequence of the disjointed process in the early Truman years. As mentioned previously, the War Department had control of all things nuclear as it oversaw the Manhattan Project and the development, maintenance, and potential delivery of the U.S. stockpile. The military wrested more informal bureaucratic authority after the failures of James Byrnes to implement atomic diplomacy and the Baruch Plan to institute international control. More broadly, the National Security Act of 1947 formalized the militarization of Cold War national security policy. By integrating the policies and procedures of the military branches, intelligence, and a new National Security Council, the law centralized national security decision-making. This effectively left nuclear policy to the military.

A second important factor: the diplomatic corps was busy implementing the non-military aspects of Truman’s Cold War strategy. Nuclear weapons were only a part of the broader effort. The Marshall Plan was designed to rebuild Western Europe, and the Truman

⁵⁴ Leffler, *A Preponderance of Power*, 140.

Doctrine drew the administration's attention to the Middle East, the Mediterranean, and southeast Asia. Leffler argues,

Whether military forces should be configured for deterrence, support of peacetime diplomacy, waging limited war, or implementing strategic moves in times of global conflict should have been a matter of enormous concern to [the State Department] Policy Planning Staff paper number 33 had stipulated that military force was critical for deterrence, casting shadows on the international diplomatic chessboard and influencing the physiological attitudes of the chess players. [But] absorbed with other concerns, Kennan and his colleagues did not care enough to study either the magnitude or the composition of forces necessary to accomplish these purposes.⁵⁵

This distracted indifference highlights a final point. Throughout the early Truman administration, most foreign policy officials believed that the Soviet Union would avoid military conflict altogether. Given the American nuclear monopoly, outright confrontation was unexpected. (This changed, though, with the USSR's successful nuclear test in 1949.) Consequently, the whole of nuclear strategy and doctrine creation was left to the military.

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MILITARY PLANNING

In *The Absolute Weapon*, Bernard Brodie makes a simple assertion: the atomic bomb “was a revolutionary development which alternated the basic character of war itself.”⁵⁷ The military innovations of the past were not only less destructive but also allowed for adaptation by the opponent. The same was not true of nuclear weapons. They all but

⁵⁵ Leffler, *A Preponderance of Power*, 276.

⁵⁶ United States Department of State. *National Security Affairs*. Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954. Edited by the Historical Office, vol. 2, pt. 2. Washington DC: U.S. Government Printing Office. G/PM Files, Lot 68, Document 349. <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1952-54v02p2/d6>.

⁵⁷ Bernard Brodie, *The Absolute Weapon* (New Haven: Yale Institute of International Studies, 1946), Available at: <https://www.osti.gov/opennet/servlets/purl/16380564-wvLB09/16380564.pdf>.

assured the “annihilation of both victor and vanquished.”⁵⁸ Yet, this did not lead Brodie to leave the issue; instead, he argued this new type of war must be considered from the very beginning. However, in crafting nuclear strategy, the military fell into the same trap as those who tried to understand the Soviet threat in 1945 and 1946 – an over reliance on old concepts for a new reality.

Outside the context of World War II, the military use of nuclear weapons was first considered in the summer of 1945. After the Potsdam Conference, the Joint Chiefs of Staff drafted JCS 1496 which outlined a surprise first strike policy. By August, this concept was integrated into Plan Totality, the contingency that considered a conventional war with the Soviet Union. The plan, though, was more thought exercise than a practical proposal. It called for a nuclear first strike against twenty Soviet cities, although the U.S. stockpile included only two nuclear weapons. The Pincher Plan (June 1946) was more deliberate. Three chiefs of staff – Dwight Eisenhower, Carl Spaatz, and Chester Nimitz – believed that, although unlikely, any war with the Soviet Union would be total and required the strategic use of nuclear weapons.⁵⁹ Pincher focused on the same twenty cities, but targeted Soviet war making abilities.

Pincher is a perfect example of an old military concept being applied to a new reality. Throughout World War II, the Allies conducted strategic bombing against Germany and Japan. The concept was grounded in the belief that warfighting is a function of resources, industry, and economy – the Kenney thesis discussed above. So, bombing runs targeted key industrial areas and cities. However, the publication of the *United States Strategic Bombing Survey* called the approach’s efficacy into question.⁶⁰ Advocates and

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Schnabel, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy*, 74-75.

⁶⁰ *The United States Strategic Bombing Survey, Overall Report, European War*. 1945. Available at: <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015049492716;view=1up;seq=5>.

opponents cherry-picked the voluminous data to make their arguments, but it was inconclusive whether the bombing had been decisive or a failure.⁶¹ Even so, the Pincher Plan applied the strategic bombing model to potential nuclear war with the Soviet Union. It chose targets, analyzed necessary explosive yields, and mapped a logistics plan that included the use of overseas military bases.^{62 63}

Two problems were apparent. First, at no point did the chiefs describe or defend the efficacy of strategic bombing. Bernard Brodie had posed a question in 1947: “What we need to know is ‘How many bombs will do what’... and the what must be reckoned in overall strategic results rather than merely acres destroyed.”⁶⁴ Pincher failed in this respect. Second, and more practically, there were huge logistical problems. There were simply not enough nuclear weapons in the stockpile to execute Pincher. The plan called for fifty bombs, but the U.S. only had nine available for immediate use – a fact the Joint Chiefs and the President did not know when the plan was authorized. Delivery was also a concern. The main air platform the air force would use was the B-29, but the aircraft’s range was hundreds of miles too short for an attack on the targeted Soviet cities.⁶⁵

Nevertheless, military planning for nuclear war continued using the same strategic bombing backbone. (Logistical shortcomings were corrected through increased nuclear production, new aircraft development, and agreements with allies for the use of overseas military bases.) The difference in the plans that followed – Broiler (1947), Hall Moon (May 1948), SAC Emergency War Plan 1-49, Trojan (1949), and Dropshot (1950)⁶⁶ - was scope,

⁶¹ Kaplan, *The Wizards of Armageddon*, 35.

⁶² Leffler, *A Preponderance of Power*, 113.

⁶³ Michio Kaku and Daniel Axelrod. *To Win a Nuclear War*. 1st ed. (Boston: South End Press, 1987), 35.

⁶⁴ Kaplan, *The Wizards of Armageddon*, 35.

⁶⁵ Kuku, *To Win a Nuclear War*, 43-44.

⁶⁶ For a detailed outline and discussion of Dropshot, see Anthony Cave Brown, ed, *Dropshot: The United States Plan for War with the Soviet Union in 1957* (New York: The Dial Press/James Wade, 1978).

not strategy. Each called for an increasing number of atomic bombs, but used the same targeting criteria laid out in Pincher.⁶⁷ Criticism did come – from Brodie, then a consultant to the Air Staff, and in the form of the Harmon and Hull Reports in 1949 – but it had less effect than budgetary wrangling in Congress.

OLD CONCEPTS, NEW REALITY: CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES

Harry Truman was undoubtedly an impressive and consequential president. After inheriting the White House from one of the most popular men to occupy it, he managed the end of World War II and the first uses of an atomic weapon, oversaw the Marshall Plan and the creation of NATO, reshaped the national security bureaucracy, survived a crisis in Berlin, and lead the country through the Korean War. Indeed, Winston Churchill praised the President at the end of his term: “I must confess sir, I held you in very low regard. I loathed your taking the place of Franklin Roosevelt. I misjudged you badly. Since that time, you, more than any other man, have saved Western civilization.”⁶⁸ Nevertheless, this section can be read as a negative assessment of Truman; it has highlighted unchallenged assumptions, broken processes, and policy failures. This is not intended to be an indictment against whole of Truman’s legacy, but there are important lessons to be learned from his handling of the nuclear issue.

In July 1944, the scientist Niels Bohr wrote a memorandum to President Roosevelt about the atomic bomb and its implications. He argued,

⁶⁷ Desmond Ball writes, “Despite their centrality, there was little discussion of targeting issues until the mid-1970s. Strategic discourse rarely proceeded beyond general arguments concerning concepts such as Minimum Deterrence, Massive Retaliation, No-Cities Counterforce, Assured Destruction, Damage Limitation, Flexible Response, and Controlled Escalation; issues relating to the actual employment of nuclear weapons in pursuance of these various concepts and doctrines were addressed only infrequently.” (Desmond Ball and Jeffrey Richelson, eds, *Strategic Nuclear Targeting* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), 15).

⁶⁸ “The Presidency: The World of Harry Truman,” *TIME*, January 8, 1973, <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,910501,00.html>.

Quite apart from the question of how soon the weapon will be ready for use and what role it may play in the present war, this situation raises a number of problems which call for the most urgent attention. Unless, indeed, some agreement about the control of the use of the new active materials can be obtained in due time, any temporary advantage, however great, may be outweighed by a perpetual menace to human security.⁶⁹

Bohr's point was that the scientific revolution that created the atomic bomb required another revolution – in U.S. assumptions and approach to international relations.⁷⁰ Regrettably, President Truman's approach was the opposite for two reasons. First, unchallenged assumptions quickly became unchangeable policy. And second, circumstance cemented the effects of prior decisions. The two documents that ultimately defined the administration's approach – NSC 20/4 and NSC 68 – are illustrative.

Written in November 1948, NSC 20/4⁷¹ was the first comprehensive statement of security policy the United States government created, and it described the Soviet threat and U.S. objectives vis-à-vis that threat. The paper begins with a bold estimate: “Communist ideology and Soviet behavior clearly demonstrate that the objective of the leaders of the USSR is the domination of the world.” The foundations of this threat, it assessed, was the hostile intent the Soviets in Eurasia and their capability to project power in pursuit of their goals. Here, it is important to notice the pervasiveness of early conceptions of relative power in the administration. Like Donovan and Kennan, NSC 20/4 saw the roots of Soviet power in their ability to harness resources and industry. In fact, the assumptions are equivalent: power is economic, and the atomic bomb had negligible influence or impact.

⁶⁹ “Niels Bohr's Memorandum to President Roosevelt, July 1944.” *National Science Digital Library*, 2015. Available at: <http://www.atomicarchive.com/Docs/ManhattanProject/Bohrmemo.shtml>.

⁷⁰ Clarefield and Wiecek, *Nuclear America*, 98-99.

⁷¹ United States Department of State. *General, the United Nations*. Foreign Relations of the United States, 1948. Edited by the Historical Office, vol. 1, pt. 2. Washington DC: U.S. Government Printing Office. Document 61. <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1948v01p2/d61>.

Already, the options in the early Cold War were limited by the rapid demobilization of the conventional military, but an approach that failed to reevaluate basic assumptions made the problem worse.⁷² The nature of nuclear weapons should have motivated Truman to start from ‘square-one.’ Given the personalities and processes involved, he likely would have come to similar conclusions, but the exercise would have laid the foundation for faster, more proactive policy decisions.

By 1950, Truman was forced to think more creatively about nuclear weapons and the role of the military. The Soviets had tested their first atomic bomb the year before and tensions on the Korean peninsula were escalating. “The foregoing analysis indicates that the probable fission bomb capability and possible thermonuclear bomb capability of the Soviet Union have greatly intensified the Soviet threat to the security of the United States. This threat is of the same character as that described in NSC 20/4,, but is more immediate than had previously been estimated,” NSC 68 concluded.⁷³

In response, American policymakers went about the militarization of containment.⁷⁴ The military threat had grown, and thus the military response would need to grow. Here, again, long standing assumptions were pervasive. First, American interests were defined by the threat of the Soviet Union. The policy recommendations in NSC 68, even those with a nonmilitary focus, were meant to undermine the Soviet Union. Such a singular focus made planning simpler, but per John Lewis Gaddis “the effect was vastly to

⁷² Historian Lori Lyn Bogle correctly argues, “What Truman and the NSC apparently did not foresee was that increasing number of prospective targets, the growing complexity of atomic weapons and their delivery systems, improvements in Soviet air defense and Soviet acquisition of atomic bombs would require increasingly rigid operational planning, a trend which would steadily reduce the choices available to the President in a nuclear confrontation.” (Lori Lyn Bogle, *The Cold War: National Security Policy Planning from Truman to Reagan, from Stalin to Gorbachev* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 14).

⁷³ United States Department of State. *National Security Affairs, Foreign Economic Policy*. Foreign Relations of the United States, 1950. Edited by the Historical Office, vol. 1. Washington DC: U.S. Government Printing Office. Document 85. <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1950v01/d85>.

⁷⁴ See John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

increase the number and variety of interests deemed relevant to the national security, and to blur distinctions between them.”⁷⁵ Second, the relinquishment of planning to the military perpetuated the reliance on a strategic bombing model applied to nuclear weapons. There was debate between advocates of counterforce and countervalue targeting, but the assumptions remained the same. The consequence, as with NSC 20/4, was the limiting of options. The bomb became a narrowly defined military device, rather than the broader tool of national power some would have preferred. Fundamentally, unchallenged assumptions turned into limited and unchangeable policy options.

NSC 20/4 and NSC 68 also highlight the cementing effect of circumstance. The impact of events outside Truman’s control point to the path dependence at play when pervasive assumptions meet a broken policy process. The story of the Harmon Report is instructive. In 1949, President Truman requested a study of American nuclear strategy. He wanted to answer one question: would the plan cause the outright defeat of the Soviet Union? Air Force General Harmon delivered his assessment in January 1950. Although Plan Trojan would kill millions, it would not “bring about capitulation, destroy the roots of communism, or critically weaken the power of the Soviet leadership to dominate the people.”⁷⁶ His bottom line was that the U.S. nuclear plans were not decisive. Such a report should have forced the administration back to the drawing board. Instead, it doubled down.

Two events can explain their reluctance to change. First, in 1949, the Soviet Union successfully tested an atomic weapon. Truman had long believed that the American atomic monopoly would not be seriously challenged until the middle of the next decade, so the test was shocking. In response, the U.S. recommitted to the pursuit of a more destructive hydrogen bomb. This was the second event. When the H-bomb was finally tested in 1952,

⁷⁵ Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, 92.

⁷⁶ Kaku, *To Win a Nuclear War*, 60.

the destructiveness of potential nuclear war had cemented fear of the Soviet Union and the importance of military response into the minds of American policy makers. As the Council on Foreign Relations noted, “The war of universal extermination which had hitherto been a vague theoretical possibility was suddenly brought frighteningly close.”⁷⁷

President Truman’s approach to nuclear strategy is instructive, but unfortunately its lessons were learned through failure. By failing to reevaluate fundamental assumptions after the surrender of Japan and allowing circumstance to codify policy choices, the administration laid the foundation for a tense, militarized Cold War.

⁷⁷ Richard Stebbins and Council on Foreign Relations, *The United States in World Affairs: 1950*, 1st ed (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1950), 65).

CHAPTER 3: THE EISENHOWER ADMINISTRATION

The United States in 1952 was troubled and divided. The latter Truman years had seen war break out in Korea, the commander of that war fired for insubordination (this, after the so-called admirals revolt in 1949), and Joseph McCarthy was stoking fears of communism. The country was looking for change, and it turned to the former Supreme Allied Commander for Europe, Dwight Eisenhower. A novice politician, he nevertheless swamped the Democratic nominee, Adlai Stevenson, and his Republican Party gained enough seats in the House and Senate to secure a Congressional majority.⁷⁸ Whereas President Truman inherited the presidency unprepared and caught between competing ideological interests, Dwight Eisenhower arrived with a mission and a mandate.

Fundamental to this mandate was the balancing of unlimited interests with finite means. NSC 68 was aggressive in its expansion of militarized containment, but by design or neglect, it failed to consider the immense cost of a military buildup – nuclear and conventional. Relying on a revamped national security decision-making system, Eisenhower oversaw an unprecedented, forward leaning reconstitution of U.S. nuclear strategy. What followed the New Look, though, was more reactive. The Soviet launch of *Sputnik* and a broader debate about massive retaliation forced the administration to reevaluate its approach. Ultimately, despite his reticence to grow military budgets, Eisenhower laid the foundation for what would become Kennedy's Flexible Response.

President Eisenhower would ultimately prove more effective in nuclear decision making than his predecessor, but the tensions his style and process created are equally instructive. Including a wide number of voices and encouraging debate among his advisors

⁷⁸ For a detailed description of the role of security policy in the election of Eisenhower, see Chapter 4, Robert R. Bowie and Richard H. Immerman, *Waging Peace: How Eisenhower Shaped an Enduring Cold War Legacy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

prevented groupthink, but it caused many NSC products to be inconclusive and vague. Additionally, the separation of civilian and military strategic processing highlighted the necessity of integrative decision-making and planning. Finally, like Truman, Eisenhower failed to regularly reevaluate the assumptions that animated his policies which led to a degree of path dependence.

EISENHOWER’S REORGANIZATION EFFORTS

Eisenhower brought to the presidency an unprecedented level of organizational experience. Throughout his military career – from West Point to Europe – he was noticed more for his administrative and organizational abilities than for any tactical prowess. Thus, it is unsurprising that his first order of business as President was bureaucratic reorganization.

Days into his administration, Eisenhower established the President’s Advisory Committee on Government Organization (PACGO) and appointed Nelson Rockefeller as its chair. The committee’s task was to provide advice on ways to “promote economy and efficiency in the operations” of the executive branch.⁷⁹ But, while PACGO reflected the Republican desire to streamline the government, Eisenhower was personally intent to clean up the national security process. The effort included multiple prongs.

First, Eisenhower diversified and empowered his cabinet. He nominated a mix of notable policy experts and outside generalists to key cabinet positions – John Foster Dulles as Secretary of State, Charles Wilson as Secretary of Defense, and Allen Dulles as director

⁷⁹ “Executive Order 10432—Establishing the President's Advisory Committee on Government Organization.” *The American Presidency Project, Dwight Eisenhower*. Available at: <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=106561>.

of central intelligence.⁸⁰ And, to each of these appointees, he tasked the running of their departments. Rather than micromanage, the President wanted to focus on casting a strategic vision and trusting the departments to do their work.

Second, he reasserted the power of the Secretary of Defense. The Joint Chiefs of Staff had become importantly influential during the Truman administration, but the process had become rife with inter-service rivalry and stove piped decision-making. So, Eisenhower transitioned agencies, personnel decisions, and administrative responsibility away from the chiefs and to the Secretary of Defense. This was sold to Congress as an attempt to focus JCS work on national policy rather than routine service responsibilities. Regardless, the effect was a Secretary of Defense truly in charge of his department rather than another voice at the table.⁸¹

The most notable process change, though, was the revitalization of the National Security Council (NSC). Under Truman, the body met infrequently and was rarely the venue for the most important policy discussions. President Eisenhower was the opposite. He appointed the first permanent National Security Advisor (NSA), Robert Cutler, and created two subsidiary boards to help manage the expected increased workload – the Planning Board, later called the deputies committee, and the Operations Coordinating Board.^{82 83}

⁸⁰ According to author Patrick Anderson, this was very intentional: “Eisenhower preferred a staff of generalists, with specialists assigned to the various departments.” (Anderson, *The President’s Men*, 139).

⁸¹ Gerard H. Clarfield, *Security with Solvency: Dwight D. Eisenhower and the Shaping of the American Military Establishment*, (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 1999), 98-103.

⁸² Peter J. Roman, *Eisenhower and the Missile Gap* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), 20.

⁸³ See Bowie, *Waging Peace*, Chapter 5.

Eisenhower's whole reorganization effort was focused on achieving unity of command and developing team work, and it produced results.^{84 85 86} Eisenhower chaired weekly NSC meetings where he encouraged discussion and debate on the important policy issues of the day.⁸⁷ "Its sessions are long bitter and tough," he said, "Out of that discussion we're trying to hammer policy..."⁸⁸ Such an adversarial approach could have created tension between staff, but per political scientist Peter Roman,

Eisenhower was particularly well served by his White House Staff, which dutifully provided him with the information and analysis necessary for making decisions.... In the formulation of national strategy, the White House staff assisted Eisenhower without limiting his decision-making authority.... They accepted [the] verdict, recognizing that [decision-making] was the president's prerogative and their role was only to bring policy options to his attention.^{89 90}

This reshuffling was done rapidly, and by spring 1953, the Eisenhower administration was ready to put the new process to work on a reformulation of U.S. national security and nuclear policy.

⁸⁴ See Clarfield, *Security with Solvency*, Chapters 1 and 2.

⁸⁵ See also H.W. Brands, *Cold Warriors: Eisenhower's Generation and American Foreign Policy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988).

⁸⁶ See also Anderson, *The President's Men*, Chapter 4.

⁸⁷ Most accounts state that Eisenhower only missed twenty-nine of these meetings in his eight years in office – only seven percent.

⁸⁸ Robert A. Divine, *Eisenhower and the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 24.

⁸⁹ Roman, *Eisenhower and the Missile Gap*, 206.

⁹⁰ "Eisenhower expected, even invited, internal policy debates and was especially cognizant of the importance of giving all sides an opportunity to state their views. However, once a policy had been decided upon he expected the members of the team to pull together." (Clarfield, *Security with Solvency*. 142).

PHASE ONE: ACTIVE POLICY AND THE NEW LOOK⁹¹

Eisenhower took issue with Truman's approach to national security, but the most troubling factor for him was the cost. In a frenzy to meet the growing Soviet threat, the Truman administration poured billions of dollars into the Defense Department while perpetuating wasteful "stop-and-start planning." So, as a candidate, Eisenhower focused his campaign on the idea of security with solvency. He called for "...planning for the future on something more solid than yesterday's headlines"⁹² and for an aggressive cut to overall defense expenditures.⁹³

To balance these competing goals, Eisenhower created Project Solarium in May 1953. He believed that the course set by Truman in NSC 20/4 and NSC 68 was leading toward disaster with its combination of antagonism, short mindedness, and high fiscal burden.⁹⁴ It needed reformulation. Therefore, the President task the NSC with the creation of an exercise to consider what choices were available. Three task forces were organized and were told to consider one major policy option each: (1) a continuation of Truman style containment, (2) clear specification of American interests and aggressive deterrence of Soviet action in those areas, and (3) a policy of active liberation that would undermine and eventually eliminate Soviet external control. By June, the task forces' work was complete, and in July they briefed the NSC.^{95 96}

⁹¹ "In the first phase, the United States worked actively to impose its policies on foreign affair..." (Paul Y. Hammond, *The Cold War Years: American Foreign Policy Since 1945* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1969), 95).

⁹² Bowie, *Waging Peace*, 75.

⁹³ Roman, *Eisenhower and the Missile Gap*, 20-21.

⁹⁴ John Foster Dulles wrote in TIME magazine, "the Truman administration had 'adopted a series of emergency measure which are fantastically costly not only in money but in their warping of our American way of life.'" (Townsend Hoopes, *The Devil and John Foster Dulles* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1973), 192).

⁹⁵ George H. Quester, *Nuclear Diplomacy* (New York: The Dunellen Company, Inc., 1970), 90.

⁹⁶ See Bowie, *Waging Peace*, Chapter 8.

With the Solarium reports in hand, the National Security Council began work on its first enunciation of the administration's reformulated national security strategy. Over the course of six-weeks, a special committee worked on a first draft that considered the President's commitments and intent, the nuance of each Solarium option, and the expertise of each cabinet department. That draft was edited by NSA Cutler, sent to the Planning Board, and eventually taken up at a meeting of the NSC chaired by the President.

Before considering the content of what became NSC 162/2, it is important to note an interesting paradox. Project Solarium was unprecedented. Robert Bowie, the former director of the Policy Planning Staff for John Foster Dulles, argues, "no President before or after Eisenhower...ever received such a systemic and focused briefing on the threats facing the nation's security and the possible strategies for coping with them."⁹⁷ Yet, the policy draft considered by the President in October 1953 was "watered down and obscure," "modified and conditioned."⁹⁸ This lack of clarity was a negative consequence of the process itself. In a search for consensus, Eisenhower's first policy document glossed over important issues and left others unresolved. Unfortunately, this lack of clarity and direction would plague the President and the NSC throughout the administration.

That said, NSC 162/2 – or the Basic National Security Policy (BNSP)⁹⁹ – was a marked change from the Truman administration. It identified two problems that any policy had to address: "to meet the Soviet threat to U.S. security" and "in doing so, to avoid seriously weakening the U.S. economy or undermining our fundamental values and institutions." It is notable that fiscal considerations were so central in a national security policy document – those two statements are the first bullets in the paper – but unsurprising

⁹⁷ Bowie, *Waging Peace*, 127.

⁹⁸ Bowie, *Waging Peace*, 142.

⁹⁹ "A Report to the National Security Council on Basic National Security Policy." Washington DC, 1953. Available at: <https://fas.org/irp/offdocs/nsc-hst/nsc-162-2.pdf>.

given the President's belief that the "foundation for military strength is economic strength."¹⁰⁰ ¹⁰¹ However, a focus on fiscal responsibility required a broader change in approach. The equilibrium Eisenhower sought was found in the second Project Solarium option. Deterrence of the Soviet Union and a reduction in expenditures would be achieved by relying on alliance partners, covert operations, and nuclear weapons.

The New Look, as NSC 162/2 became known, was given its first public articulation in January 1954 in a speech by Secretary of State Dulles to the Council on Foreign Relations. The speech began by criticizing the Truman administration on two fronts. First, Dulles stated that President Eisenhower would be focused on the "long haul" rather than responding to every emergency. Second, he criticized the costliness of establishing permanent security. Whether forward deployed or not, the existence of a large conventional force would prove strategically and financially draining. Therefore, argued Dulles, "the way to deter aggression is for the free community to be willing and able to respond vigorously at places and with means of its own choosing." This meant, fundamentally, the Eisenhower administration was willing to wield the American strategic nuclear arsenal across the whole spectrum of conflict.¹⁰² ¹⁰³

Dulles' speech shocked many. The concept of massive retaliation was startlingly aggressive. To be fair, the Secretary of State was blasé in his rhetoric on nuclear weapons. He believed that they were indeed destructive, but should serve as a "normal part of the arsenal of war."¹⁰⁴ Nevertheless, massive retaliation was not entirely new. Historian Fred

¹⁰⁰ Clarfield, *Security with Solvency*, 3.

¹⁰¹ "What concerned Eisenhower was that the guardians of national security would not forget that 'the purpose of America is to defend a way of life rather than merely to defend property, homes, or lives.'" (Bowie, *Waging Peace*, 45).

¹⁰² Kaplan, *The Wizards of Armageddon*, 175.

¹⁰³ See also Hoopes, *The Devil and John Foster Dulles*, 197-201.

¹⁰⁴ Kaplan, *The Wizards of Armageddon*, 179.

Kaplan notes, "...whether they knew it or not, the Dulles speech merely codified the military policy that the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff had already formulated in the late Truman Administration."¹⁰⁵ The initial military nuclear plans drawn up by Strategic Air Command were founded on the idea that if war came, nuclear weapons would be used without hesitation; the Navy began to accept the same approach when they received their first nuclear munitions in 1951.

From January 1954 to October 1957, the Eisenhower left the doctrine of massive retaliation largely intact. The U.S. was engaged in other foreign policy issues: CIA covert action in Guatemala, diplomatically responding to the Warsaw Pact, handling the Suez Crisis, and a broad declaration of economic assistance to those threatened by armed aggression (the Eisenhower Doctrine). But, primarily, stability was a consequence of continued American military superiority. Though they had tested a nuclear weapon in 1949, the Soviet Union was reliant on aging air platforms and an inferior air defense system.

PHASE TWO: THE BEGINNINGS OF FLEXIBLE RESPONSE¹⁰⁶

October 1957 saw this stability crumble. The Soviet Union successfully launched the world's first artificial satellite – *Sputnik* – and in doing so, changed the fundamental dynamics of the Cold War.

There was a mixed response initially. American scientists congratulated the huge achievement by their Soviet counterparts. The White House seemed unimpressed. The American public, though, were scared. Nuclear war is a game with no margin for error, and

¹⁰⁵ Kaplan, *The Wizards of Armageddon*, 181.

¹⁰⁶ "...in the second period, our policy making seemed to consist mainly of responses to events." (Hammond, *The Cold War Years*, 95).

the U.S. had outpaced the Soviets in every technological category that mattered thus far. The confidence that fact brought was shaken by *Sputnik*. Many feared the military consequences. Scientist Edward Teller, the father of the hydrogen bomb, stated on television, "...America had lost 'a battle more important and greater than Pearl Harbor.'" ¹⁰⁷ Congresswoman Clare Boothe Luce went further by saying, "It really doesn't matter whether the satellite has any military value. The important thing is that the Russians have left the earth and the race for control of the universe has started."¹⁰⁸ For the first time in the Cold War, there was a serious feeling of vulnerability in the United States. ¹⁰⁹

More broadly, though, by October 1957, members of the national security establishment were beginning to doubt the efficacy of massive retaliation and the New Look. Rumblings could be heard as early as 1953. When the New Look was introduced, those with doubts pointed to the Korean War as an example of failed nuclear deterrence. By 1950, both the U.S. and USSR had nuclear weapons, yet, they did not prevent the war from devolving into a proxy Cold War confrontation. In 1953, another example could be raised – Vietnam.

This combination of fear and doubt became the backdrop against which the National Security Council considered its revisions to the BNSP in November. The debate considered two issues: first, the level of American vulnerability; and second, the credibility of deterrence under the New Look.

¹⁰⁷ Kaplan, *The Wizards of Armageddon*, 135.

¹⁰⁸ Kaplan, *The Wizards of Armageddon*, 135.

¹⁰⁹ For a detailed analysis of the impact of Sputnik, see Robert Divine, *The Sputnik Challenge* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

get off from the ground; only a few that happened to be on a test flight at the time of the alert were airborne.¹¹³

At the time, SAC was the only nuclear capability the United States had at its disposal. If it was vulnerable, then the whole of massive retaliation was called into question. Now, not only was the public fearful because of *Sputnik*, but there was broad concern in within the national security establishment. Still, the President and members of the NSC balked at the report's recommendations. It called for a massive increase in defense expenditures - \$44 billion – which was a nonstarter with the fiscally conservative administration.

Credible Deterrence

Political scientist Thomas Shelling outlines three things necessary for rational deterrence. First, a threat must be clear and credible, which requires both the capability and willingness to use force. Second, the threat must be large enough to coerce. Finally, the threatened state must believe that they will not be punished if they comply.¹¹⁴ In 1957, the U.S. fell short in all three categories, but the first – credibility – was the most pressing issue facing the NSC as it debated the BNSP.

The National Security Advisor was the most skeptical member of the Eisenhower team, and the credibility of massive retaliation was his biggest concern. In meetings with foreign leaders and in his intelligence briefings, Cutler heard allies express their concern that the U.S. was more reticent to implement its policy of massive retaliation than its public statements would indicate. He also voiced his own apprehension about the lack of a non-

¹¹³ Kaplan, *The Wizards of Armageddon*, 132.

¹¹⁴ Thomas Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), Chapter 1, “The Diplomacy of Violence,” 1-34.

nuclear option to counter the Soviets. The intelligence community assessed that the USSR would have ICBM capabilities by 1959, which would create a situation of mutual deterrence – both states having the capability to launch a first strike against the other. Cutler believed that in such a scenario, “the Soviets would...undermine the West by means of limited aggression using conventional forces...[but] we do not have the conventional forces available” to respond.¹¹⁵ He went on:

If the U.S. loses its will to retaliate when certain areas other than its own territory are violated, its alliances will crumble and the enemy will be embolden to take greater risks in subversion, economic penetration, even in minor military aggression on outlying or minor areas.... When a state of mutual deterrence has arrived, the U.S. will eventually be forced, openly or tacitly, to admit that we will never use our massive retaliatory power with [high megaton] weapons *except* in self-defense. By that admission, the U.S. will have lost the *element of uncertainty* as to retaliation against attack other than on the homeland, which is the core of “deterrent value.”¹¹⁶

Both Secretary Dulles and President Eisenhower were sympathetic to Cutler’s critique but still had misgivings. Dulles thought that, though conditions had changed, they “...[did] not invalidate the massive retaliation concept, but put limits on it.”¹¹⁷ President Eisenhower’s concern was more fundamental on both strategic and budgetary grounds. He believed that any indication of reticence to use nuclear weapons would embolden the Soviets and weaken deterrence overall. An abandonment of massive retaliation would signal such reticence. It would require an expansion of conventional forces, which would have to be balanced by a decrease in nuclear capability – the President was standing by his goal of fiscal control.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ Roman, *Eisenhower and the Missile Gap*, 69.

¹¹⁶ Roman, *Eisenhower and the Missile Gap*, 69.

¹¹⁷ Roman, *Eisenhower and the Missile Gap*, 71.

¹¹⁸ Roman, *Eisenhower and the Missile Gap*, 64.

As the NSC prepared to draft a new BNSP, Cutler pressed the issue but had few good policy recommendations to make.¹¹⁹ The one he did settle on was one a "...flexible and selective capability (including nuclear) to deter or suppress limited military aggression."¹²⁰ But, the President was not convinced that such a limited war scenario could be controlled: "...the umbrella would be a lightning rod. Each small war makes global war more likely."¹²¹

Ultimately, NSC 5810 struck an unsatisfactory balance. Cutler, and eventually Dulles, could not overcome the President's budgetary and strategic objections to a large policy change. More than strategy, it was the budget that motivated Eisenhower to retain massive retaliation as core strategy. However, the language of the document left room for the limited war / flexible response option to be studied. The NSC spent the next few months trying to find consensus, but bureaucratic competition ultimately killed the effort.

Addressing vulnerability was an easier and less contentious process, though it did require President Eisenhower to loosen his grip on the budget. The first priority was a reduction in SAC surprise attack vulnerability. General Thomas Power, LeMay's replacement as commander, ordered an overhaul in the command's alert system. First, ground forces were required to trim their response time to less than thirty minutes; in 1960, one-third of the force was put on fifteen-minute ground alert. Second, SAC developed a program of airborne alert. To prevent the elimination of all SAC assets in a Soviet first

¹¹⁹ There were also outside voices of concern. Nuclear strategist William Kaufmann wrote a monograph claiming that circumstances were not ideal for a policy of deterrence, much less on of massive retaliation. (William W. Kauffman, "The Requirements of Deterrence" (New Haven: Center of International Studies, Princeton University, 1954) Available at: <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015034327646;view=1up;seq=4>). Henry Kissinger also wrote on the subject. His first book, *Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy* expressed concern about Eisenhower's policy.

¹²⁰ Roman, *Eisenhower and the Missile Gap*, 74.

¹²¹ Roman, *Eisenhower and the Missile Gap*, 76.

strike, a small number of bombers would always remain in the air. Finally, contracts were awarded for the development of a new bomber – the B-70.

Vulnerability reduction was not limited to SAC, though. The same thinking that led General Power to institute airborne alert led the Eisenhower administration to expand non-airborne nuclear delivery capabilities. Development was already underway in multiple ballistic missile programs. Six rockets were being developed with the intent of choosing the best two. However, after *Sputnik* proved that the U.S. had fallen behind the Soviet in missile technology, Eisenhower agreed to field all six. Importantly, this missile development effort included the submarine based Polaris platform. Thus, Eisenhower laid the foundation for the nuclear triad and ensured a security second strike capability.

UN-REVIEWED ASSUMPTIONS AND CHALLENGES OF PROCESS

Like Truman, Dwight Eisenhower is seen favorably through the lens of history.¹²² This recognition has grown over time and it tends to center on the broader nostalgia for the 1950s. The decade was Pax Americana defined – relative peace, a booming economy, and growing opportunity. The President should receive some of the credit. He saw the Korean War to a close, limited U.S. Soviet escalation, balanced the budget, and oversaw a host of domestic successes – the interstate highway system, welfare reform, and a modest expansion of civil rights.

Strategic praise is also appropriate. Setting aside CIA covert actions in Guatemala and Iran, Eisenhower kept the U.S. away from foreign wars after the armistice

¹²² They are often seeded next to one another, comfortably in the top ten in rankings of U.S. presidents. See 2017 CSPAN Survey: <https://www.c-span.org/presidentsurvey2017/?page=overall>; 2015 Brookings Institution Poll: <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/fixgov/2015/02/13/measuring-obama-against-the-great-presidents/>; 2013 FiveThirtyEight Meta-analysis: https://fivethirtyeight.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/01/23/contemplating-obamas-place-in-history-statistically/?_r=0.

in Korea. He refused to budge under Pentagon pressure to get more involved in Vietnam. During the Suez Crisis, the condemned traditional allies Britain and France for their invasion of Egypt. And most fundamentally, the President navigated a time of tension with the Soviet Union without a nuclear mishap. John Lewis Gaddis offers his praise of Eisenhower's New Look policy, saying it was

...Coherent, bearing signs of his influence at almost every level, careful, for the most part, in its relation of ends to means and, on the whole, more consistent with than detrimental to the national interest. It is a modest claim, but nonetheless a more favorable one than one can reasonably make about either the strategy that preceded, or the one that followed, the 'New Look.'¹²³

This is not to say there is no room for criticism. But, unlike for Truman, it is the balance of positive and negative in Eisenhower's decision-making that is instructive. On two critical issues— strategic assumptions and policy process – there are things to be praised and things to criticize. Both the positive and negative are important.

The inability to interrogate and evaluate strategic assumptions was a failure of the Truman administration. Not so for Eisenhower, at least at the outset. Project Solarium was an unprecedented step. No president before or after has conducted such a thorough, inclusive, and integrative strategic review. The success of the Solarium – and later NSC – process was born from three factors. First, there was intentional time set aside. It is no secret that the daily work of government often precludes long-term strategic thinking. Yet, Eisenhower believed it was important to start his first time by intentionally reviewing how it would approach national security. Second, Solarium was the result of a top-down, presidential directive. This meant that the President truly cared; it would not be an intellectual exercise whose report would sit on a shelf gathering dust. Third, it included

¹²³ Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, 197.

alternative analysis. Task Force A was headed by George Kennan was tasked with a thorough consideration of containment; Army General McCormack led Task Force B as it analyzed alternative containment implementation options; and Task Force C reviewed the option for aggressive rollback. Although Eisenhower had strong doubts about the feasibility and sustainability of NSC 68-based strategy, he wanted all options considered during Solarium.¹²⁴

Unfortunately, the impact of Solarium was short lived. Once its report was codified in NSC 162/2, the process of dedicated strategic review was set aside. The National Security Council reconsidered the BNSP each year, but it became little more than an outline of the year's budgetary priorities. As with Truman, it is unlikely that the conclusions Eisenhower reached would be substantively different. But, as the Solarium effort proved, a serious consideration of assumptions and options can lead to creativity and change.

The President's record on process is also a mix of positive and negative. In the same early term effort that produced Project Solarium, Eisenhower revamped the national security advisory apparatus. His first changes were bureaucratic. He appointed the first permanent National Security Advisor – Robert Cutler – and gave him a latitude to be a policy entrepreneur. He reasserted civilian control of the Pentagon by moving powers away from the Joint Chiefs and to the Secretary. Eisenhower also took an active role in the process, chairing nearly every meeting of the National Security Council during his two terms.¹²⁵

¹²⁴ Michele Flournoy and Shawn Brimley argue that a Solarium approach would be useful in the modern context: Michele A. Flournoy and Shawn W. Brimley, "Strategic Planning for National Security: A New Solarium Project for the 21st Century" (New Haven: The Princeton Project on National Security, 2006) Available at: <https://www.princeton.edu/~ppns/papers/interagencyQNSR.pdf>.)

¹²⁵ Eisenhower is quoted in his memoirs as stating: "Organization cannot make a genius out of an incompetent" or "make the decisions which are required to trigger necessary action." (Fred I. Greenstein and Richard H. Immerman, "Effective National Security Advising: Recovering the Eisenhower Legacy," *Political Science Quarterly* 115 (3): 335-345, Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/2658121.pdf>.)

His broader effort was supervisory. The National Security Act of 1947 reorganized the bureaucracy, but it took active management – something Truman was reluctant to do. Political scientist Fred Greenstein has described Eisenhower’s style as a *hidden hand*¹²⁶ and a *neutral process manager*.¹²⁷ This is not to say he had no unique ideas of his own, but the President believed that hearing a healthy debate on all the options was a prerequisite for good decisions. He said, “You must get courageous men of strong views, and let them debate and argue with each other. You listen, and see if there's anything been brought up, any idea, that changes your own view, or enriches your view or adds to it. Then you start studying...”^{128 129}

Such an approach, though, has inherent problems. For one, in the search for consensus, policy options can get watered down. Eisenhower believed himself to be a decider; his military experience would attest to training in that regard. However, NSC 162/2 and its reevaluation in 1957 were unsatisfactory to both sides. Maybe that is the sign of good, moderate policy – both sides disliking the outcome – but it made crafting a coherent nuclear policy difficult.

The other challenge Eisenhower faced was continuing strategic inflexibility. While he was able to successfully manage nuclear crises in Taiwan and Berlin and set the strategic nuclear force on a more secure foundation, an unyielding defense of massive retaliation prevented alternative options from being considered. The advisory process, by which the

¹²⁶ Fred I. Greenstein, “‘The Hidden Hand Presidency: Eisenhower as a Leader’: A 1994 Perspective,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 24 (2): 233-241., Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/27551238.pdf>.

¹²⁷ Greenstein and Immerman, “Effective National Security Advising.”

¹²⁸ Greenstein and Immerman, “Effective National Security Advising.”

¹²⁹ Political scientist Alexander George would write an article advocating for just such an adversarial advisory approach in 1972. (Alexander L. George, “The Case for Multiple Advocacy in Making Foreign Policy,” *The American Political Science Review* 66 (3): 751-785, Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/1957476.pdf>.)

President heard all the arguments, never netted a consensus that could convince him to move away from nuclear containment paired to balanced budgets. When he did consider a change during the 1957 BNSP debate, it was hesitant and not to last. By 1960, Eisenhower signed onto the first Single Integrated Operational Plan (SIOP). That plan slammed the door on consideration of a limited war addition to containment and solidified SAC's preoccupation with nuclear control and strategic bombing.

CHAPTER 4: RECOMMENDATIONS

Six months after the surrender of Japan ended the Second World War, U.S. President Truman, British Prime Minister Atlee, and Canadian Prime Minister issued a statement about the advent of nuclear weapons. They stated,

We recognize that the application of recent scientific discoveries to the methods and practice of war has placed at the disposal of mankind means of destruction hitherto unknown, against which there can be no adequate military defense, and in the employment of which no single nation can in fact have a monopoly.¹³⁰

In a speech before the United Nations, President Kennedy described it another way:

Today, every inhabitant of this planet must contemplate the day when this planet may no longer be habitable. Every man, woman, and child lives under a nuclear sword of Damocles, hanging by the slenderest of threads, capable of being cut at any moment by accident or miscalculation or by madness.¹³¹

In conjunction, these statements describe the reality policymakers confronted. The world was more dangerous. It included categories and combinations of conflict no one had yet considered, including the United States. And, with the introduction of massively destructive weapons, the consequences of miscalculation were immense.

The strategic decision-making of the early Cold War, then, can be best understood as an attempt to understand this new reality. Truman saw the spectrum of potential conflict expand; Eisenhower sought to integrate nuclear lessons into the traditional military paradigm; and Kennedy attempted to fill the space below conventional war in a search for new policy options. Importantly, adversaries also had an impact. The Soviet Union and

¹³⁰ Jane Vaynman, "Nonproliferation Turns 60," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, November 11, 2005., <http://carnegieendowment.org/2005/10/31/nonproliferation-turns-60-pub-17664>.

¹³¹ "JFK Address at the U.N. General Assembly, 25 September 1961." *John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum*. <https://www.jfklibrary.org/Asset-Viewer/DOPIN64xJUGRKgdHJ9NfgQ.aspx>.

other revisionists expanded the spectrum of conflict up from the diplomatic end. International propaganda and proxy conflicts became integral influence tools in their efforts to shape American policy.

American policymakers today face a similar situation. The modern world has not been forced to confront a new weapon as destructive as the atomic bomb – though an argument could be made about offensive cyber capabilities. And yet, the spectrum of conflict is uniquely complicated. The United States confronts two potential near peer adversaries – Russia and China – two mid-tier revisionist states – Iran and North Korea – and global networks of terror and crime that seek to undermine the U.S. led international order. Broadly, the ability to successfully respond to individual threats exists, given the proper application of time and resources. But, conflicts of the future will require decision-making to be integrative; threats must be understood and responded to across the entire spectrum of conflict.

As mentioned at the outset, this reality requires an answer to three strategic questions. (1) How does one conceive of the modern world and the implications of its complexity? (2) How should decisions be made? (3) What are policy tools to creatively, rapidly, and holistically respond to such an environment?

Seeking to answer the second, this study has looked to the nuclear decision making of Presidents Truman and Eisenhower. The moment they faced was like today – near peer adversaries facing off in an unknown environment awash in changing technology – and the lessons their administrations offer are instructive. So, as a conclusion, two broad recommendations are appropriate. First, the process of decision-making must be Clausewitzian – intentional, integrative, and intelligent. Second, assumptions must be challenged regularly, not out of doubt but in search of the best approach.

CLAUSEWITZIAN DECISION MAKING

It is admittedly trite to include the Prussian strategist Carl von Clausewitz to the study of strategy. His *On War* was written in consideration of Napoleon's success in Europe, but the lessons it teaches are modernly applicable. Unsurprisingly that is true in the case of Truman, Eisenhower, and modern decision-making.

The most significant challenge in strategic decision-making is the tying of national policy objectives to operational design – politics by other means. This is challenging enough but made more so by the inherent friction and fog of conflict. Truman and Eisenhower were very different when handling this the operational design of their nuclear strategies. Truman tended to cede responsibility to the military and the hawks in his administration. Advisors like Paul Nitze were the primary drivers of NSC 68, and the Joint Chiefs and Strategic Air Command were the ones to craft strategy for the operational use of nuclear weapons. Eisenhower was very different. He was intimately involved with the decision-making process, attending nearly every NSC meeting during his time in office. He encouraged debate and departmental autonomy, but strategic command and control was centralized in the President.

Here, a first point becomes evident. Policymakers must be intentional about the process they create. Truman was a novice that inherited a broken advisory system, and much of his time as president was defined by his attempts to manage or fix the system. Eisenhower, conversely, reorganized and reinvigorated the national security advisory process during his first weeks in office. These contradictory processes led to different results – Truman's nuclear strategy was the result of pervasive assumptions cemented by circumstance, while Eisenhower spent his first term imposing his vision of massive retaliation and deterrence. The axiom states personnel is policy, but more fundamentally, process is policy and must be treated with intentionality.

The second aspect of decision-making relevant for modern policymakers is found in a different Clausewitz argument. He states, “bringing a war, or one of its campaigns, to a successful close requires a thorough grasp of national policy. On that level strategy and policy coalesce: the commander-in-chief is simultaneously a statesman.”¹³² Eisenhower is a negative example of this type of integration. For all his effort to design and control the civilian advisory process, the President left the military generally to its own strategic devices. He was involved with decisions that effected the military – the nuclear triad, for example – but the Joint Chiefs were often excluded from the broader policy discussions taking place at the NSC. Such an approach failed to account for serious concerns my senior military leaders in regards to the credibility of massive retaliation. Modern decision makers have an even higher incentive than Eisenhower to pursue process integration. The spectrum of threats and policy options is wide, which requires that all relevant stakeholders are present, active, and engaged.

Note, this is not a call for micromanagement. Policymakers cannot become like Lyndon Johnson stooped over a map selecting bombing targets in Vietnam. They should direct both the national policy and the strategy creation process, and should oversee the implementation of policy goals – both horizontal and vertical leadership.

Finally, modern decision making requires intelligence. In his analysis of Napoleon, Clausewitz honed in on an intangible cause of success. The Frenchman had an uncanny ability to survey a battlefield, identify a weakness in the enemy, and maneuver his forces to exploit it. The word used is *coup d’oeil* – “the quick recognition of truth that the mind would ordinarily miss or would perceive only after long study and reflection.”¹³³ It

¹³² Carl von Clausewitz, edited by Michael Howard and Peter Paret, *On War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 111.

¹³³ Clausewitz, *On War*, 103.

can be taught, but Clausewitzian intelligence is more a function of skill and experience.¹³⁴ Recommending an intangible may seem axiomatic, but there are severe consequences if one ignores the nature of the policymaker himself. Given the complexity of the modern environment, coup d'oeil is fundamental to success. Therefore, it is important that policymakers be chosen and developed with it in mind.

PROPER ASSUMPTIONS, REGULARLY INTERROGATED

The best process will only go as far the assumptions of its participants allow, and circumstance can have a cementing effect. That was especially true during the Truman years. Pre-war and pre-bomb concepts of relative power and strategic bombing were pervasive throughout the development of nuclear strategy. Major events – Soviet expansion in Eastern Europe, for example – cemented those assumptions, which then drove the creation of policy. Another event would occur – the successful test of a Soviet atomic device – and the original policy would become unquestionable. Before long, what began as a strategy of cooperation and escalation management became the militarized version of containment found in NSC 68.

First, to avoid Truman's mistakes, it is imperative that policymakers begin their time in power with a clear-eyed view of their own assumptions: What do I believe? Why? what got me to that conclusion? This is true personally and organizationally.

¹³⁴ “The Commander of an army neither requires to be a learned explorer of history nor a publicist, but he must be well versed in the higher affairs of State; he must know and be able to judge correctly of traditional tendencies, interests at stake, the immediate questions at issue, and the characters of leading persons; he need not be a close observer of men, a sharp dissector of human character, but he must know the character, the feelings, the habits, the peculiar faults and inclinations of those whom he is to command. He need not understand anything about the make of a carriage, or the harness of a Battery horse, but he must know how to calculate exactly the march of a column, under different circumstances, according to the time it requires. These are things the knowledge of which cannot be forced out by an apparatus of scientific formula and machinery: they are only to be gained by the exercise of an accurate judgment in the observation of things and of men, aided by a special talent for the apprehension of both.” (Clausewitz, *On War*, 146)

Therefore, implementing a process like Eisenhower's Project Solarium would be a useful first step. Second, and to avoid the mistake of Eisenhower, policymakers must regularly reevaluate the assumptions that drive their policy choices. It requires intentional time away and a willingness to change directions, but such an approach would ensure that strategy and policy are grounded and effective. Finally, during this intentional process of assumption analysis, it is important to avoid becoming doctrinaire or hubristic. Eisenhower was entirely convinced that he could achieve the desired level of deterrence while balancing the budget. By 1957, the strategy of massive retaliation was showing signs of weakness, and yet the President remained steadfastly committed. The result was strategic inflexibility.

The modern world is dangerous and challenging. Policymakers face near peer competitors, mid-tier revisionist states, and networks that seek to threaten the United States and the international order it underwrites. The challenges are many and diverse, but as policymakers begin to grapple with the creation of grey zone strategy and policy, it will be useful to look to history for lessons. In this regard, Presidents Truman and Eisenhower are useful examples. They faced a moment like today, but their approaches and outcomes were very different from one another. One was not better than the other, but the lessons those differences highlight should be seen as a baseline for strategic decision-making in the modern grey zone.

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