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The Origins of Major War

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Bipolarity, Shifting Power, and the Origins of the Cold War, 1945–1950

The puzzle that animates the following two chapters is a simple one: What explains the changes in the likelihood of major war between the United States and the Soviet Union from 1944 to 1963? This question has two parts. In this chapter I examine the first big jump in the probability of superpower war, namely, the move from wartime alliance to cold war. Given ideological differences, some disagreements between America and Russia were inevitable after 1945 (just as they are today with China). Yet the relationship could have stayed in the realm of a moderate spheres-of-influence détente, rather than escalating into a dangerous cold war. Why did it not? I argue that the United States was most responsible for the shift to cold war, since it was the first to adopt provocative hard-line policies. As early as mid-1945, American concern for the long-term rise of the Soviet state drove U.S. leaders to implement a vigorous and destabilizing containment strategy. The next chapter analyzes the second element of the puzzle: the movement from the sustained tension of normal cold war interaction to the intense crisis periods of the early cold war era. Here I show that crises over Berlin in 1948 and 1961 and over Cuba in 1962 were driven more by fears of relative decline during marked power oscillations than by domestic- or individual-level factors. These fears led leaders on both sides to take steps that put their nations on the slippery slope to nuclear war.

The Cold War Debate

Three perspectives on the origins of the cold war have dominated the debate. For traditionalists, the cold war was caused by Soviet aggression, which forced the United States into a containment posture it would have

otherwise avoided. The Kremlin sought to expand its sphere by promoting Communist revolution abroad and through direct occupation of neighboring lands. Consistent with deterrence theory and classical realism, proponents of this view argue that had it not been for hostile Soviet intentions—rooted in ideology, the need to justify internal repression, or a paranoid view of Soviet security needs—both superpowers could have cooperated.[1]

Revisionists turn the traditionalist view on its head, laying most of the blame on the United States. Washington initiated hostile actions from 1945 to 1947 as Soviet leaders sought to rebuild after a devastating war. Reasons for U.S. aggression vary across scholars. For neomarxist revisionists, American leaders strove to promote global capitalism in order to avoid depression. Others view U.S. behavior as more complex, reflecting a mix of factors which include economic motives, but also a paranoid view of security and distorted beliefs about the likelihood of Communist revolution in western Europe.[2]

The third argument, postrevisionism, offers a moderate and highly eclectic position incorporating domestic, individual, and systemic factors. Above all, however, the origins of the cold war are found in the tragedy of the security dilemma. Both superpowers sought security, yet each saw the other as aggressive. Each side's hard-line actions simply reinforced the perception that its rival desired its destruction. As a result, a spiral of hostility was created which persisted into the 1980s.[3]

This chapter breaks ranks with all three perspectives. Contrary to traditionalists, I argue that the cold war was sparked by actions taken by Washington, beginning in 1945, to contain Russia. I thus reject a core premise of traditionalism: that U.S. leaders were initially naïve, and only switched to containment once Moscow's hostile intentions could no longer be ignored. Traditionalists contend that containment began only in 1947 with the Truman Doctrine, within signs of a shift appearing in 1946. Containment as a policy certainly became more intense after 1947, but the core elements were in place by July–August 1945. Yet my argument rejects the revisionist view that American efforts to uphold capitalism, or paranoia about global communism, drove U.S. policy. Containment in 1945 reflected rational geopolitics: U.S. leaders recognized that if Russia was allowed to grow, it could eventually overwhelm the American sphere. Prudent security calculations, not elite paranoia and greed, were determinative.

This chapter's argument is closest to postrevisionism, in that U.S. security concerns led to hard-line policies which provoked Soviet suspicions, thus creating an intensifying spiral of tension. Three differences are evident, however. First, I argue that in mid-1945 Harry Truman moved to containment not because he perceived Stalin as innately hostile—in fact, he liked and even respected Stalin at this time. Rather, Truman recognized that if America did *not* act, Russia would grow significantly, and Soviet leaders—namely, those *replacing* Stalin—might not be so moderate down

the road. The postrevisionist argument, like the spiral model, posits that the actor initiating the spiral believes the other is presently aggressive, even if it is not.[4] My argument operates from an even more tragic foundation. The actor which begins the spiral (in this case, the United States) is fairly sure that, currently, the other's intentions are relatively restrained. But in an environment of dynamic change, it remains uncertain about the other's future intentions should the latter reach a position of preponderance. Hence, the actor reluctantly initiates a hard-line policy—not because the other is seen as necessarily hostile but to avoid decline.[5] This argument does not mean that Truman had no concerns with Soviet behavior in eastern Europe/the Near East or with the brutal nature of Stalin's regime. He did. Yet these concerns, the evidence indicates, were less salient than fears of Soviet growth and future intentions.

Second, I demonstrate that U.S. decision-makers anticipated spiral effects, but chose a hard-line posture anyway. In postrevisionism, as in the spiral model, each side acts believing that the other will see its moves as defensive, not aggressive.[6] I show, however, that Truman and his advisers were quite aware that their policies would heighten Soviet suspicions and thus foster a cold war standoff, with all the attendant risks of inadvertent war. Yet they also felt such risks must be accepted in order to avoid a greater evil, namely, the unabated growth of Soviet power.

Third, and finally, by breaking power into three forms, the chapter provides a more complete systemic explanation for the cold war than other theories have offered. It was Truman's fear of Soviet growth in economic and potential power that led him to adopt hard-line policies. He recognized that should Moscow successfully consolidate its new larger realm, it could translate these gains into superior military power. Truman thus moved to restrict Russia's development through military, economic, and political means. Postrevisionists, by downplaying exogenous trends in economic and potential power, end up treating power as solely a function of state behavior. That is, the spiral gets going only when one state stupidly starts the ball rolling by increasing military power. I argue that leaders, knowing that decline may occur in the absence of strong action, may be forced into escalatory policies to avert a loss in power.

For political scientists schooled in established cold war debates, my perspective may seem too extreme to be fully plausible. Yet it aligns nicely with the most comprehensive documentary analysis of the Truman era, namely, the seminal work of the historian Melvyn Leffler.[7] Leffler shows that U.S. leaders sought to thwart Soviet growth to ensure America's preponderance and therefore long-term security. Thus beginning in 1945, Washington undertook forceful actions to avoid decline. My argument is strongly influenced by Leffler's, but it goes a few steps further. I seek to show that the U.S. containment strategy in mid-1945 was even more comprehensive than Leffler observes, despite Truman's relatively moderate view of Stalin.

Before turning to the evidence, I should discuss one evident aspect of the cold war period: major war never occurred. Neorealists use this outcome to argue that bipolar systems are more stable. This conclusion cannot be sustained.[8] The post-1945 period did experience strong jumps in the probability of major war, especially during the Cuban missile crisis. The fact that we often got close to major war despite the prudence inspired by nuclear weapons underscores the inherent instability of the bipolar cold war era. Moreover, as I discuss in chapter 8, three examples of bipolarity prior to 1945—Sparta versus Athens, Carthage versus Rome, and France versus the Hapsburgs—each gave rise to devastating major wars, and for the reasons anticipated by the theory. In each case a declining state with at best slight military superiority attacked the rising superpower before it became overwhelming. Moreover, the declining state was inferior in potential power and thus had reason to believe that decline would be both deep and inevitable. These cases provide strong additional support for my argument regarding the dynamics of bipolar systems.

The strong U.S. position after 1944 helps explain why Washington did not simply copy the pattern of previous bipolar conflicts and initiate war before it lost its nuclear monopoly. As I later discuss, U.S. leaders and officials actively considered preventive war in the late 1940s. Yet because America possessed the superiority in potential and economic power needed for long-term military preponderance, it was not necessary to turn immediately to this ultimate sanction. All-out preventive war, given its costs and risks, is rational only when there are no other means of reversing decline. Since Washington still had these other options, the better first steps were the ones taken: arms racing and containment to preserve superiority and thus security.

The Origins of Preventive Containment, 1945

Standard accounts of the cold war usually designate 1947 as the year when the American containment strategy was set in place. Yet the core elements of containment were actually laid down by August 1945. The full extent of this policy can be seen in the eight interlocking actions taken in 1945 to restrict Soviet growth in military, economic, and potential power:

1. The surrounding of Russia with air and naval bases, in order to project offensive power against the Soviet heartland.
2. The rebuilding of western Europe, which required the revitalization of western Germany, a nation that had just killed over twenty-five million Russians.

3. The ending of aid to Russia, even as it was extended to China. This included resisting Soviet claims to badly needed reparations from Germany.
4. The demonstration of the atomic bomb, which—in addition to ending the Pacific war quickly—was designed to restrict Soviet penetration of Manchuria and to convince Moscow to accept U.S. terms for the postwar peace.
5. The rushing of U.S. and Allied troops into Korea, China, and Manchuria to prevent Communist consolidation of areas already conceded to Moscow by prior agreements.
6. The exclusion of any role for the Soviet Union in the occupation and revitalization of Japan.
7. The denial of atomic secrets and materials to Russia.
8. The restricting of Soviet naval access to the Mediterranean and North Sea, despite recognition of Soviet legal rights.

In implementing this policy, Truman did not believe he was abandoning all chances for cooperation with the Soviet Union. But any cooperative arrangement would be on U.S. terms. In short, the United States would follow a two-track policy. Washington would do everything necessary to maintain a preponderant position. Simultaneously, it would try to work out a great power modus vivendi. If the Soviets went along, so much the better. If they did not, Truman preferred a cold war—with all its attending risks of inadvertent war—to a situation where the United States cooperated, but at the expense of long-term power. Allowing the Soviets to grow to a dominant position would threaten U.S. security, should their intentions prove more aggressive down the road.[9]

Truman and Secretary of State James F. Byrnes acted despite believing Stalin's intentions were relatively moderate. They also acted knowing that their policies could spark a cold war rivalry that would increase the likelihood of inadvertent war. The evidence thus supports the argument that in the face of decline, leaders will take their states into risky rivalries when hard-line postures offer a better means to security than either soft-line cooperation or preventive war.

U.S. Strategic Thinking up to June 1945

U.S. geopolitical concerns were already shifting before the end of the war. In spring 1944, Admiral William Leahy, Roosevelt's chief of staff, wrote to Secretary of State Cordell Hull that the outstanding fact about the new global situation was "the recent phenomenal development of the heretofore latent Russian military and economic strength—a development which seems certain to prove epochal in its bearing on future politico-military international relationship, and which has yet to reach the full scope attainable with Russian resources."[10] In December 1944, George Kennan, Averell Harriman's next-in-command at the Moscow embassy, expanded on this view. In a report to Harriman that foreshadowed his February 1946 Long Telegram,[11] he warned that by occupying eastern Europe, Russia had shifted the overall balance of population. Given Russia's industrial strength, this new larger realm "constitute[d] a single force far greater than any other that will be left on the European continent . . . and it would be folly to underestimate [its] potential—for good or for evil."[12]

Harriman thought enough of Kennan's analysis to forward it to the State Department, and it undoubtedly shaped his campaign in early 1945 to expose the growing Russian threat.[13] Yet Harriman was hardly a lone voice. On 2 April 1945, a top secret report from the Office of Strategic Services (the forerunner of the CIA) was sent to Roosevelt and subsequently to Truman. It summarized the dilemma:

> Russia will emerge from the present conflict as by far the strongest nation in Europe and Asia—strong enough, if the United States should stand aside, to dominate Europe and at the same time to establish her hegemony over Asia. Russia's natural resources and manpower are so great that within relatively few years she can be much more powerful than either Germany or Japan has ever been. In the easily foreseeable future Russia may well outrank even the United States in military potential.[14]

Two weeks later, the Joint Chiefs distributed a paper titled "Revision of Policy with Relation to Russia." Lend-lease to Russia, it argued, had ironically succeeded too well, leading to a "new and serious situation"—a much stronger Russia. The report not only recommended ending military aid, but also stressed the importance of maintaining a firm stand against Moscow.[15] An OSS report to Truman on 5 May stressed that if a hands-off policy were adopted, the Soviets might unite the resources of Europe and Asia and then within a generation outbuild the United States in military production.[16] Yet another OSS report on 11 May noted that despite Russia's wartime devastation

> her recovery and further [industrial] development promise to be rapid, and the sharp upward trend of her population is another favorable long-term factor of the greatest consequence. . . . Thus, Russia has every mark and characteristic of a rising power, destined to stand with America as one of the two strongest states in the world.[17]

These concerns were well understood. Acting Secretary of State Joseph C. Grew wrote to Harriman in May of his fears of steadily increasing Soviet power. A June paper by Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson underscored that Russia's control of a sphere of 200 million people would give it the capability to project influence into China and Japan. Army Chief of Staff

George C. Marshall told Stimson that the paper captured the U.S. dilemma, namely, that by helping Russia in the war, "we have made [it] . . . the unquestionably dominant power in Europe," a view reiterated by Byrnes in July, not long after he became secretary of state.[18] The potential power of technology was also worrisome. In a May cabinet meeting, Truman emphasized that America must not only keep up with the Russians in scientific research, but also stay "ten years ahead of them."[19]

Given these fears, a policy to hold onto U.S. preponderance naturally followed. A 2 April memorandum from the War Department to the Joint Chiefs of Staff bluntly argued that the United States could not wait until Soviet intentions were revealed before taking preparatory actions in anticipation of another world war. Washington should therefore build a "West-European-American power system as a counterweight to Russia."[20] Efforts toward a modus vivendi would not end. But the two-track strategy begun under Roosevelt would be maintained.[21] Marshall on 31 May told a meeting of the Interim Committee, the committee established to study the policy implications of the atomic bomb, that since Russia was driven primarily by security, some cooperation on atomic energy might be acceptable. Yet he still favored forming an alliance to force Russia to conform to U.S. wishes. Byrnes, who opposed atomic sharing, put the two-track approach in a form more acceptable to the group: he "expressed the view, *which was generally agreed to by all present*, that the most desirable program would be to push ahead as fast as possible in production and research to make certain that we stay ahead and at the same time make every effort to better our political relations with Russia."[22]

The Quest for Bases

The first pillar of the eight-pronged containment strategy was bases to project power against Eurasia. Already by December 1942, Roosevelt was asking the Joint Chiefs to consider postwar air base requirements.[23] A March 1943 report of the Joint Strategic Survey Committee noted that since international organizations might not keep the postwar peace, overseas bases were essential to U.S. security, "and their acquisition . . . must be considered as among our primary war aims."[24] Although Roosevelt hoped the bases would help implement his Four Policemen concept, it seems clear he hedged his bets to prepare for possible containment. On 22 August 1943, a Joint JCS/OSS committee issued a memorandum titled "Strategy and Policy: Can America and Russia Cooperate?" The United States and Britain, it argued, must immediately concentrate forces on the continent to make a policy of hostility unattractive to Moscow. This stance was necessary even though "the major Soviet war aim is the security of the Soviet Union."[25]

In November, the president approved JCS 570, which emphasized the

need, in an era of strategic bombing, to keep any future enemy as far from U.S. shores as possible. To this end, the document envisioned bases in the western Pacific, west Africa, Iceland, Japan, and the east Asian mainland, including Korea and northern China.[26] In mid-January 1944, Roosevelt approved the idea of a system of U.S. air bases, and on 5 February he wrote to Hull to emphasize that the State, War, and Navy departments and the Joint Chiefs should study the issue of bases for naval and ground forces as well.[27]

By March 1945, Roosevelt had to reconcile his plan for island bases in the western Pacific with the principles of self-determination to be enshrined in the UN charter. The solution was to define "trusteeships" so as to provide a facade for U.S. control. As Stimson noted, the president knew he was constrained by his own declared principles. Yet "he is just as keen as anybody else to take the full power of arming [the islands] and using them to protect the peace and ourselves during any war that may come, and for that reason his people [at the first UN conference] will by trying to form a definition of trusteeships or mandates which will permit that to be done."[28]

Through spring and summer 1945, the military updated its list of required bases.[29] In late August, the value of such bases in an atomic era in which Russia would be the primary adversary was made clear. A Joint War Plans Committee paper argued that given the emergence of long-range aircraft and missiles, devastating attacks could now be launched from great distances. The enemy must therefore be destroyed "at the source," and the best means was "overwhelming force combined with surprise." In short, "in the event of a breakdown in relations between the U.S. and U.S.S.R. . . . U.S. dominated bases on the European and Asiatic continents will be required for full projection of our offensive power."[30]

The Rebuilding of Western Europe and the Rehabilitation of Germany

As the war entered its last year, there were many, led most prominently by Treasury Secretary Henry Morgenthau, who sought the destruction of Germany as a nation-state. Given the devastation Germany had caused twice in the century, in 1944 Roosevelt himself supported this position. It is thus significant that by spring 1945, majority opinion had swung to the opposite view, namely, that Germany's rehabilitation was critical to U.S. long-term security. The reason for the shift was simple: western Europe was devastated, and without Germany's integration into its economy, the region might fall prey to Communist revolutions. Such revolutions, even if Moscow did not actively promote them, would nonetheless increase the potential power of the Communist sphere.

By September 1944, Roosevelt, under Morgenthau's urging, had accepted the division of Germany into harmless independent provinces. Morgenthau's plan, in a watered-down form, was embedded in the September

draft of JCS 1067. This document gave control of occupied Germany to the Allied military, and required the Allies to take no steps toward Germany's economic rehabilitation.[31] Through the winter of 1945, the State Department resisted this plan, arguing it would create economic chaos in Germany and thus in western Europe. On 10 March, Secretary of State Edward R. Stettinius convinced Roosevelt to rescind the order, but this was soon reversed. With Truman's approval in early May, JCS 1067 was apparently established as American policy in occupied Germany.[32]

Morgenthau's victory was more apparent than real, however. As U.S. forces marched deeper into Germany in March, the nation's total devastation became increasingly evident. Concerns that Europe might fall to Communist revolution now had more salience. On 14 March, a White House counsel informed Roosevelt of the dire food shortage in northwestern Europe.[33] Three days later, Stimson noted that the situation in Germany was approaching a crisis, leading him to write three memoranda to Roosevelt challenging the "economic fallacies" in Morgenthau's plan.[34] These views were reinforced by Assistant Secretary of War John J. McCloy upon his return from Germany. McCloy informed Truman on 26 April that the "complete economic, social, and political collapse going on in Central Europe" was almost "unparalleled in history."[35] On 16 May, Stimson told Truman that all members of the War Council agreed that famine in Europe was very probable. "This is likely to be followed by political revolution and Communistic infiltration. Our defense against this situation are the western [European] governments. . . . It is vital to keep these countries from being driven to revolution or Communism by famine."[36] Truman acted quickly. On 22 May, he sent a letter to the various agencies stressing that future peace required the restoration of western European economies.[37]

Germany was the key. In a letter to Stimson on 8 June, Acting Secretary of State Grew agreed that drastic steps had to be taken to supply German coal to what were already being called "our Western European Allies."[38] On 24 June, Truman told Churchill that military authorities in Germany had to exert every effort to increase German coal production for export to western Europe. Otherwise, "we will have turmoil and unrest in the very areas of Western Europe on which the whole stability of the continent depends."[39]

The need to resuscitate Germany for Europe's sake had much to do with the strong U.S. stand at Potsdam over reparations, as I discuss later. By minimizing reparations to Russia from Germany's western zone, Truman sought to strengthen western Europe at the Soviets' expense. As for U.S. policy in occupied Germany, Military Governor Lucius Clay was allowed to ignore the harsh dictates of JCS 1067. Clay understood that without German coal, revolution would engulf the western sphere.[40] Also critical was the Ruhr valley's integration, notwithstanding French objections, back into the west German zone. Both state department and JCS briefing papers for

Truman emphasized the Ruhr's importance to German recovery and thus to western European stability.[41]

Thus we see that by the start of Potsdam, Truman favored German revitalization. In a meeting on 3 July, Stimson argued that Germany should be rehabilitated and any desire for vengeance discarded. Truman said that "that was just the way he thought it should be exactly."[42] Considering the twenty-seven million lives they had just lost to Germany, Soviet leaders could not have viewed this development with equanimity.[43]

Economic Containment: Denying Lend-Lease and Reparations to Russia

The containment policy that emerged after February 1945 had an important economic dimension. Harriman made policy-makers aware of Russia's need for capital to rebuild a ravaged country. In January 1945, the Soviets had asked for a low-interest loan of six billion dollars, and at Yalta they had made twenty billion dollars the figure for discussions on reparations from Germany. Harriman's refrain through April was that loans should be used as leverage to exact concessions, while lend-lease should be limited only to material that would help the Soviets fight Japan.[44]

His arguments had an impact. On 9 May, Secretary of State Edward R. Stettinius wrote Grew that programs to assist "western Allies" should have priority over assistance to Russia, and that America should immediately curtail lend-lease shipments to Russia. U.S. policy on this "and similar matters" (presumably meaning reparation issues) should be one of "firm[ness] while avoiding any implication of a threat." Two days later, Stimson told Truman of the need for a more forceful policy regarding Russia and lend-lease.[45] Grew also spoke with Truman that day, arguing that lend-lease supplies designated for Russia not related to war against Japan should be cut off immediately and that such goods should be diverted to western Europe.[46] Truman approved this policy on 11 May. Bureaucratic overzealousness, however, led to the cancellation of *all* lend-lease to Russia. Although the order was quickly rescinded to permit aid for the Asian front, for Stalin this was a sign of things to come.[47]

Moscow soon became aware of the rediversion of lend-lease to western Europe and protested. Through June and July, Harriman, upon instruction, offered a number of excuses.[48] On 18 August, the contradiction of giving lend-lease to states such as France, which had played no role in defeating the Nazis, and denying it to Russia, became too great. Truman approved a directive ending all lend-lease aid (except for the secret aid that would be sent to China, as we will see). The actual cutoff of Russia had occurred on 17 August, even though lend-lease continued to others until 2 September. When the assistant chief of the Division of Lend-Lease inquired about this

discrepancy, he was informed that the decision was deliberate and was "part of a general squeeze now being put on the U.S.S.R."[49]

As for reparations, Truman's get-tough strategy took the form of appointing Edwin Pauley to head the U.S. reparations negotiating team. In early July, Pauley, under direction from Byrnes and Truman, took a new tougher stand in the ongoing talks with Soviet Foreign Minister Molotov. From now on, Germany would have to pay for imports out of exports before any reparations would be allowed. This would ensure that western Germany could feed itself and revive its industry before having to pay heavy reparations. Even more significantly, Pauley told Molotov that no fixed sum of reparations from the western zone would go to Russia. The Yalta figure of twenty billion, of which ten billion was to come from western Germany, was discarded, despite Russian protests. In its place, Russia was offered only a certain *percent* of what the western zone could afford to pay, after paying for imports.[50] As the Soviets understood, this meant Russia would receive few if any goods from the western zone, since it could always be claimed that there was little surplus above and beyond German imports.

At Potsdam, Truman stuck to his guns, fortified by the recently successful test of the atomic bomb. After much discussion, the Russians were forced to concede to Pauley's position. Despite Molotov's willingness to reduce the ten billion dollar figure down to two billion—but as a guaranteed amount—the final agreement specified only a figure of 10–15 percent of western Germany's surplus industrial production. The agreement ensured there would be little coordination between western and eastern zones. The Soviets could take what they wanted from eastern Germany—a policy that of course would only hurt their sphere's overall strength. But they would receive little from the west. Since the west held most of Germany's industrial strength, this was a major blow to Soviet leaders' efforts to rebuild their industrial infrastructure.[51]

As Carolyn Woods Eisenberg notes, the American stand on reparations constituted a clear breach of the spirit of Yalta.[52] The twenty billion figure had been a symbolic recognition of the sacrifice made by Russia in defeating Nazi Germany. Now, just three months after Hitler's defeat, Washington was helping to build up the western part of Germany as well as America's "Western Allies." The huge influx of funds for western Europe would await the Marshall Plan of 1947. But it was already clear to Moscow by late summer 1945 that U.S. leaders would work actively to constrain Soviet economic development.

The Atomic Bomb and Containment through Preponderance

To control Moscow, it was soon recognized that America held what Secretary of War Stimson called the master card: the atomic bomb. Much has been written on whether the United States practiced atomic diplomacy in

1945, thus helping make a cold war inevitable. I argue that Truman and Byrnes did indeed see the bomb as an additional means to restrict Soviet growth, even if they still hoped, at least initially, for a great power modus vivendi.

Revisionists and traditionalists have been strongly divided on why America dropped the atomic bomb. Revisionists argue that Washington wanted to send a signal to Russia,[53] while traditionalists maintain that the goal was to end the war with Japan.[54] There is no need to choose between these perspectives. Truman and Byrnes saw the bomb as a best means to the simultaneous achievement of both ends. Overall, the bomb would help Washington shape the postwar peace on its terms by demonstrating U.S. military superiority and the resolve to use it. In particular, it would limit Soviet penetration into key areas of the Far East such as Manchuria and Korea—areas that had already been conceded to Moscow by prior agreement in order to draw Russia into the Pacific war. The bomb would also end the war quickly, saving lives, while minimizing any relative loss to Russia caused by continued U.S.-Japanese fighting.

In early May, Truman approved the formation of the Interim Committee. In a committee meeting on 10 May, the group "very confidentially" discussed the bomb's connection to the Russian question.[55] Stimson's view was that the bomb's diplomatic potential should be exploited to the fullest. He told Assistant Secretary of War McCloy on 14 May that it was time to "let our actions speak for words." America had to "regain the lead and perhaps do it in a pretty rough and realist way." Toward this end, the atomic bomb was a "royal straight flush, and we mustn't be a fool about the way we play it."[56]

On 15 May, in a meeting with Harriman and Secretary of the Navy James Forrestal Stimson noted that "it may be necessary to have it out with Russia on her relations to Manchuria . . . and various other parts of North China. . . . Over any such tangled wave of problems the S-1 secret [the A-bomb] would be dominant." The Big-Three meeting should be postponed, he felt, until after the bomb was tested, since it "seems a terrible thing to gamble with such big stakes in diplomacy without having your master card in your hand."[57] In late May, Truman agreed to delay the Potsdam meeting until after 15 July (the A-bomb test was 16 July).[58]

Until October, the most forceful advocate of using the bomb for diplomatic leverage was James Byrnes, Truman's representative on the Interim Committee, and Secretary of State after 2 July. In late May, Byrnes bluntly told Leo Szilard, a scientist on the Manhattan project, that "the demonstration of the bomb might impress Russia with America's military might," perhaps making it more manageable in Europe.[59] By late July, Byrnes's belief in the bomb's diplomatic efficacy would only be strengthened by word of its true power, as we will see.

In using the bomb to deal with Russia, the goal was not to deny Moscow its gains in eastern Europe. Truman, like Roosevelt, understood that he could not alter the division of Europe. Truman's willingness to write off eastern Europe is shown by the Hopkins mission to Moscow in late May. In late April, Truman had scolded Molotov, demanding that Moscow live up to the Yalta agreements. Yet, as with Roosevelt, Truman's main concern was that Stalin provide the *facade* of democracy in eastern Europe to satisfy U.S. public opinion. Harry Hopkins's objective was to bring back this figleaf for Poland. Truman instructed Hopkins that he wanted "fair understanding" with Stalin, and that Hopkins should make Stalin aware that what transpired in eastern Europe "made no difference to U.S. interests" except in terms of the overall peace. Poland should go through the motions of holding elections. But this was for U.S. domestic consumption: Stalin, Truman told Hopkins, should make some gesture "whether he means it or not to keep it before our public that he intends to keep his word."[60]

The immediate U.S. objective in summer 1945 was not rollback in Europe, but containment in east Asia. In late May, Grew told Harriman that once Russia was in the Pacific war, Mongolia, Manchuria, and Korea would slip into its orbit.[61] Earlier that month, the OSS gave Truman a report on the expected postwar situation. Eastern Europe was already lost. Things could be done in Asia, but the United States had to act quickly, since once Japan was defeated Russia's position in Asia would be greatly strengthened. If Washington failed to act, Russia might organize China as its ally.[62]

Until late July, however, Truman faced a problem: the atomic bomb might be a dud. Truman had been warned by the military in April that should the war stay conventional, Russia had to be brought in; otherwise, it would drag on to the Russians' benefit.[63] Meeting with Truman on 18 June, the Joint Chiefs confirmed that invading Japan would be costly. Russian entry, however, would likely lead to Japan's capitulation. Truman replied that, given this information, he would use the Potsdam conference to secure from Russia all possible assistance in the war.[64] Stalin's assurance that Russia would enter the war on 15 August was obtained on 17 July, the first day of the conference, much to Truman's satisfaction.[65]

What is interesting, however, is the change in U.S. policy after the bomb's true destructive power was revealed. When Truman obtained Russian agreement to enter the war, only a very initial report on the atomic test had been received. He therefore was focused primarily on the goal of ending the war quickly. Yet Truman's thinking shifted dramatically on 21 July, when General Leslie Groves's report on the test was formally presented. This report described in great detail how truly destructive the bomb was, and how its power had far exceeded even the most optimistic expectations of the scientists.[66]

When Stimson read the report to Truman, the president "was tremen-

dously pepped up by it. . . . He said it gave him an entirely new feeling of confidence."[67] It showed. Churchill remarked the next day, after Stimson informed him of the report's contents, that he now understood why Truman the day before was a "changed man." He told the Russians "just where they got on and off and generally bossed the whole meeting."[68]

A critical change in the situation had occurred: the United States no longer needed Russia to bring about Japan's surrender. The bomb provided the magic formula both to end the war *and* to prevent any further consolidation of the Soviet sphere. Even when information on the atomic test was still fragmentary, Truman had told Pauley that the bomb "would keep the Russians straight."[69] On 20 July, with evidence arriving regarding the bomb's true power, Byrnes revealed to Walter Brown, his personal assistant, that he was now "determined to out-maneuver Stalin on China." Previously Byrnes had been pushing T. V. Soong, Chiang Kai-Shek's foreign minister, to negotiate a deal with Stalin over Manchuria to ensure Russia's early entry into the war. Now he sought to delay this agreement for as long as possible. From Brown's diary: Byrnes "hopes Soong will stand firm and then Russians will not go in [the] war. Then he feels Japan will surrender before Russia goes to war and this will save China."[70] Byrnes's faith in the bomb's coercive power seemed to know no bounds. On 28 July, he remarked that the success of the atomic test now gave him the confidence that the Soviets would agree to U.S. terms on the postwar peace. The next day, Byrnes argued that the bomb "had given us great power, and that in the last analysis, it would control."[71]

By late July, then, Washington was in a position to revise by force an agreement which had been in place for months, namely, that the Soviets would occupy Manchuria until Japan was defeated and its troops repatriated. At a 10 August cabinet meeting, Truman accepted a deal that would allow the Japanese to retain their emperor. Someone asked whether Washington should wait to hear back from the Soviets before implementing this compromise. Truman "interjected most fiercely" that the United States must proceed without Moscow. Stimson added that the Russians favored delay so they could grab as much of Manchuria as possible. Truman agreed. It "was to our interest," he argued, "that the Russians not push too far into Manchuria."[72]

The Beginning of Active Containment: China, August 1945

The bomb was not the only means to restrict Soviet consolidation in areas Washington had supposedly already conceded to the Soviet sphere. In August to September 1945, U.S. troops went into China to help Chiang Kai-Shek's Kuomingtang forces retake northern China and Manchuria.[73] The strategy was threefold. First, U.S. marines would help to patrol southern

cities so that KMT troops could be redeployed north to fight Mao's Chinese Communist Party forces. Second, lend-lease would be secretly extended to help roll back the CCP, even as it was canceled for all other allies, including Russia. Finally, Washington would press Stalin to withdraw from Manchuria and hand over control only to the KMT.

On 10 August, the Joint Chiefs wrote to Commanding General of the China Forces Albert Wedemeyer that U.S. forces were preparing to secure key ports and communication points in China "for the purpose of assisting [the KMT]." Surrenders of Japanese forces would be to the KMT only, despite the CCP's equally important role in fighting Japan. Wedemeyer was also told to assist in the rapid transport of KMT forces to northern China where the CCP was strong.[74] There was no misunderstanding of Washington's intent. On 19 August, Wedemeyer replied that he would do everything in his power "to preclude [the] loss of advantages we now enjoy in Far East and to insure that favorable conditions are created for accomplishments of ultimate U.S. political and economic objectives." He warned, however, that the U.S. objective might be hard to hide: that while ostensibly he was facilitating Japanese surrender, "actually in effect . . . we are making an important contribution to preclude successful operations by Communist forces."[75]

Much more was to come. On 3 September, Byrnes informed Truman that Chiang wanted U.S. help in building a modern military force. Byrnes recommended this course, but noted that in peacetime such a Military Advisory Group was illegal. He thus suggested acting immediately, before the war was "legally terminated," to get around this restriction. The assistance sought was significant: Byrnes noted that about thirty KMT divisions had already been equipped by the United States, and that Chiang wanted sixty more. Truman was quick to respond. On 7 September, he told Soong, acting as Chiang's special envoy, that U.S. military advice would be provided.[76] Soon after, Washington was committed to building thirty additional KMT divisions.

The situation in China continued to deteriorate, however. By October, it was becoming apparent that Stalin was siding with the CCP in its effort to occupy Manchuria. U.S. troops were dispatched to northern China to receive surrender of Japanese troops, to help remove the "Communist menace which has been growing steadily since [the] war ended."[77] On 22 October, the State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee (SWNCC) submitted a report noting U.S. support through lend-lease would now include the equipping and training of a 39-division KMT army and support for its airforce. Quoting from a prior analysis, the SWNCC report was blunt:

> "Continued support to China . . . should be carried on without hiatus in order best to preserve the present favorable position of the United States with respect to China." Our "present favorable position" in China, cannot . . . in the light of the present situation, be interpreted otherwise than as referring to our position as military collaborators with Chiang Kai-Shek.[78]

The report was approved and sent to the U.S. chargé in China on 7 November for implementation.

American aid to China was hardly insignificant: in the two months up to 15 October, it totaled more than 400 million dollars (approximately four billion in current dollars).[79] U.S. commitment to China was seen as critical to holding the line in all of Asia.[80] Truman understood the severity of the issue. In early December, he appointed General Marshall to find a solution on favorable terms. Marshall told Truman that should Chiang be unwilling to make concessions and America then failed to support him, "there would follow the tragic consequences of a divided China and of a probable Russian reassumption of power in Manchuria, the combined effect of this resulting in the defeat or loss of the major purpose of our war in the Pacific." Marshall then asked whether, in such circumstances, the United States should then just swallow its pride and support Chiang anyway, despite his antidemocratic ways. Truman and Byrnes agreed that it should.[81]

Thus U.S. containment in 1945 was not only active, but supported by a logic most scholars associate more with post-1947 policies. At the root was the premise that preserving America's "presently favorable" power position was essential to U.S. security.

Additional Measures in 1945

Efforts in 1945 to constrain the Soviet sphere were not confined to the Far East. By June, the Soviets were pressuring Turkey for better naval access to the Mediterranean Sea. A warm-water port on the Mediterranean had been a Russian geopolitical goal for centuries, and Stalin saw the end of war as the opportunity to realize it. In March, Moscow informed Ankara that the 1925 Turkish-Soviet treaty of nonaggression was no longer in force. In June, Molotov upped the ante, demanding in return for a new treaty joint control of the Dardanelles and the cessation of certain Turkish naval bases in the Mediterranean, at least in time of war. Ankara rejected these demands and sought U.S. help in countering Soviet pressure.[82]

For Washington, this pressure was part of a general Soviet effort to gain better access to the Atlantic Ocean, an effort that included Soviet demands in June for the internationalization of the Kiel canal. The canal had been built before 1914 to provide freer movement of German vessels between the North and Baltic Seas. Since the Soviets now controlled the ice-free port of Königsberg (renamed Kaliningrad), the canal's internationalization would give the Soviet navy year-round access to the At-

lantic. On both issues, the canal and Turkey, Washington responded quickly.

On 6 July, the Strategy and Policy Group gave Assistant Secretary of Defense McCloy an analysis covering both the canal and the Dardanelles. Should Washington permit their internationalization, it might set a precedent undermining U.S. control over such waterways as the Panama canal. The report sympathized with Russia's problem, since it was "practically a land-locked nation." Given short-term weakness, however, Moscow would not take military action. Washington could thus take a strong stand, and "no concessions . . . need be made."[83]

A draft of Stimson's letter to Byrnes on the issue, dated 8 July, also acknowledged there was "considerable justification" for Soviet proposals, given Russian geography. Indeed, the argument that Washington must preserve control over Panama while denying Russian control of the Dardanelles might seem illogical. It was, however, "a logical illogicality." The Soviet Union was a "vigorous nation of unlimited potential." Should Washington concede on the Kiel-Dardanelles issue, this would give Russia greater power to realize possibly expansionist aspirations "without [us] knowing for certain that she is indeed free from them." Soviet control of these waterways must therefore be opposed.[84] As we will see, Truman and Byrnes held to a similar logic: although the jury might still be out on Soviet intentions, Russia's potential was already so huge that no further growth could be permitted.

Stalin introduced the waterways question at Potsdam on 22 July. Both Truman and Churchill were sympathetic to Russia's desire to revise the convention which had given Turkey control of traffic through the Dardanelles. Over the next few days, however, both leaders refused any substantive changes. Stalin eventually agreed to postpone the issue to a later conference.[85] The results on Kiel were similar. Truman and Churchill would grant the Soviets free access through the canal. Beyond that they would not go; Kiel would not be internationalized, but would remain under the Control Council for Germany's jurisdiction. This meant that the canal would remain firmly in the western Allied camp, as it was wholly within the British occupation zone.[86]

Staying Ahead Regardless of the Costs: U.S. Policy after Nagasaki

After Nagasaki, Secretary of State Byrnes moved quickly to preserve the U.S. atomic monopoly. On 18 August, he told George Harrison, special assistant to Stimson, that since an atomic agreement was unlikely, "a continuation of all our efforts on all fronts to keep ahead of the race" was required. Scientists should therefore pursue their work full force, including work on the hydrogen bomb.[87] By this time, Stimson's attitude had moderated; he now favored some sharing of atomic secrets. When he sent McCloy in late August to discuss the issue, however, Byrnes remained "radically opposed" to sharing. The bomb for Byrnes was the perfect tool to shape the postwar peace on U.S. terms. As Stimson recorded, Byrnes was preparing for the foreign ministers' meeting "and wished to have the implied threat of the bomb in his pocket."[88]

On 12 September Stimson met with Truman to discuss a memorandum he had written on the issue. The atomic bomb was seen in many quarters, the report argued, "as a substantial offset to the growth of Russian [power]." Yet if the Soviets were not brought into an atomic partnership, the United States would be pursuing a policy of "maintain[ing] the Anglo-Saxon bloc over against the Soviet [bloc] in the possession of this weapon. Such a condition will almost certainly stimulate feverish activity on the part of the Soviet [bloc] toward the development of this bomb in what will in effect be a secret armament race of a rather desperate character." To negotiate with the bomb placed "rather ostentatiously on our hip" would only increase Soviet suspicions and distrust. Instead, an agreement had to be reached that could "sav[e] civilization not for five or for twenty years, but forever."[89]

Truman feigned sympathy, even agreeing that Washington should take Russia into its confidence.[90] His subsequent actions revealed something else. Truman supported Byrnes's strong stand at the foreign ministers' conference in September. He failed to support atomic sharing when Stimson and Under Secretary of State Dean Acheson argued their case in a 21 September cabinet meeting.[91] In a speech to Congress on 3 October, Truman deleted a section noting that atomic secrecy would not stop others from catching up in a comparatively short time, thus tacitly upholding the view that the secret could be preserved.[92] Then on 7 October, Truman made on-the-record remarks confirming he would not share the secrets. He sketched three levels of technical knowledge related to the bomb: basic scientific knowledge; engineering know-how; and the industrial capacity and resources needed to build the bomb. He used U.S. superiority on the second two levels to justify not sharing information on all three dimensions. If other nations such as Russia were to catch up to the United States, "they will have to do it on their own hook, just as we did." A few days later, an old friend asked Truman: "what it amounts to is this. That the armaments race is on, is that right?" The president replied in the affirmative but added that "we would stay ahead."[93]

By late October Byrnes's views were shifting somewhat. His failure to secure concessions in September apparently convinced him that Stimson was

right—the Soviets would not cave in to atomic diplomacy. In a speech on 31 October, he argued that cooperation depended upon compromise, and expressed Washington's sympathy with Russia's special security interests in eastern Europe.[94] He departed for the Moscow conference of foreign ministers in December with a new plan for atomic cooperation. Still, the plan did not give away much: at most, he would offer information only at the first level of basic scientific knowledge.

Truman himself seemed to soften his stance in December. He let Byrnes take his new plan to Moscow, despite opposition from notable congressmen. Yet his harsh reaction to the deal Byrnes struck indicates that Truman still only sought cooperation that preserved America's overwhelming preponderance. On Byrnes's return, Truman took him aside to reiterate the need for a hard-line stance. The Russians understood force. Thus the United States had to rebuff any Soviet moves against Turkey and Iran, maintain control of Japan, and build a strong central government in China.[95]

Military planning during the fall continued to operate from the premise that Russia must be contained. On 29 August, at a meeting of the Joint Staff Planners, Vice Admiral Russell Willson read from his draft on the new military policy.

> When it becomes evident that forces of aggression are being arrayed against us by a potential enemy, we cannot afford, through any misguided and perilous idea of avoiding an aggressive attitude, to permit the first blow to be struck against us. Our government, under such conditions, should press the issue to a prompt political decision, while making all preparations to strike the first blow [if] necessary.[96]

This passage was incorporated in SWNCC 282, Basis for the Formulation of a U.S. Military Policy, approved by the Joint Chiefs on 19 September and forwarded to the SWNCC a week later. It specified as a key national policy the "maintenance of the United States in the best possible relative position with respect to potential enemy powers."[97]

Truman's hard-line views were no doubt reinforced in mid-October by a JCS report, forwarded to his chief of staff, Leahy, which emphasized the importance of maintaining a strict policy of atomic secrecy. America's "present advantageous position" must be preserved for as long as possible, and "most certainly during the present period of uncertainty" when Russian intentions were unclear.[98] A JCS report eleven days later, with Leahy again copied, gave the Americans at least a five-year head start on the bomb: "Security in peace and victory in any future major conflict requires, inter alia, that we make every possible effort to maintain this advantage and to advance more rapidly in scientific warfare than any other nation."[99]

Preserving conventional strength was also important, but Truman, like Roosevelt, was up against the public's desire for a return to peacetime normalcy, meaning a tiny standing army. Roosevelt and Forrestal had pushed for a new Service Bill before FDR's death. When a Senate vote on 3 April killed it, Forrestal got Stimson to agree to take up the campaign for universal military training. Stimson made the government's case to the House on 15 June.[100] Truman fully supported the idea.[101] So did the State, War, and Navy departments, which agreed on 16 October that it was highly inadvisable to continue rapid demobilization. Truman took the issue to the people on 23 October, arguing before a joint session of Congress that Americans had to face the fact "that peace must be built upon power, as well as upon good will and good deeds."[102] The UMT bill, however, never passed. Truman thus switched to strengthening the armed services through unifying the War and Navy departments. Speaking to the Senate on 20 December, he laid down another building block for his campaign to prepare public opinion for the coming struggle.[103]

> Now that our enemies have surrendered it has again become all too apparent that a portion of the American people are anxious to forget all about the war ... [yet] the future peace of the world will depend in large part upon whether or not the United States ... is willing to maintain the physical strength necessary to act as a safeguard against any future aggressor.

America, he added, also required industrial mobilization and greater scientific research for military purposes.[104]

In sum, the extent to which U.S. policy-makers sought to built a position of U.S. economic-military superiority in 1945 is clear. Domestic factors played a role, restricting the resources available for containment. Moreover, public expectations that American leaders should promote a moral liberal order limited Truman's ability to be forthright about U.S. actions, especially in China and Germany. To have acknowledged the full extent of the new containment policy in 1945 might have led the United States to be blamed for the subsequent cold war. Still, this does not give the domestic-level argument much explanatory power. It can only explain a constraint on U.S. leaders—why they sought to circumvent or subvert domestic obstacles to their strategy. It cannot explain what drove them to this strategy, namely, the same geopolitical fear compelling Germany earlier in the century: the fear of a rising Russian superpower.

The Tragedy of the American Containment Policy in 1945

The evidence cited shows that U.S. leaders pursued active containment against Russia long before the "official" start of the cold war in 1946–47. This policy, as I discuss later, exacerbated Soviet suspicions and made a

cold war essentially inevitable. The tragedy is that the policy sprang not from a conviction that the Soviets were unalterably hostile, but from fear of growing Soviet power should Washington not act. Moreover, Truman and Byrnes took a hard-line posture despite strong warnings that it would make cooperation with the Soviets almost impossible.

For theorists who emphasize the perceptions of hostile intentions, it is surprising that at the time Truman crystallized his containment strategy in mid-1945 he found Stalin not entirely disagreeable. On Potsdam's first day, he wrote in his diary: "I can deal with Stalin. He is honest—but smart as hell."[105] The next day he told his old friend Joseph Davies that Stalin was a "direct" man with whom he "got along fine."[106] Even though U.S. policy hardened after 21 July, Truman's view of the Soviet leader had not changed. On 28 July he told Forrestal that he "found Stalin not difficult to do business with." He wrote his wife the next day: "I like Stalin. He is straightforward. Knows what he wants and will compromise when he can't get it."[107] To another, Truman noted that Stalin was simply a good political boss, "as near like Tom Pendergast [Truman's mentor in Missouri] as any man I know."[108] Even twelve years later, in an unsent letter to Acheson, Truman acknowledged that during this period "I liked the little son of a bitch."[109]

Truman's main concern was not Stalin, but Stalin's successors. The Soviet system, he felt, had a fundamental flaw: without a clear means of succession, any militaristic oligarch could grab the reins of power. Truman told his cabinet in mid-May that his great fear was some Russian general would take over, acting like Napoleon.[110] Near the end of Potsdam, when Stalin canceled a meeting because he had a cold, Truman wondered what would happen if Stalin suddenly died. If some "demagogue on horseback" gained control of Russia's vast army "he could play havoc with European peace." Truman also wondered "if there is a man with the necessary strength and following to step into Stalin's place and maintain peace and solidarity at home." Dictators did not train successors, and he saw no one at the conference who could do the job.[111] Even in October, Truman noted that Stalin was "a moderating influence," and that it would be great catastrophe should he die.[112]

The other architect of containment, James Byrnes, felt the same way. He admitted to Davies in July that while Molotov was problematic, he had confidence in Stalin.[113] In September, Byrnes confided to his assistant that if Molotov was not ousted he would lead Russia to the same fate Hitler had led Germany. Stalin, on the other hand, "wants peace and [Byrnes] is fearful for the world if Stalin should die."[114] This explains his efforts in December to meet directly with Stalin to secure a modus vivendi over Molotov's head.[115]

In qualifying the postrevisionist view, it is also critical to note how keenly U.S. leaders saw that their actions would make cooperation more difficult.

As early as September 1944, advisers told Stimson it would be the "height of folly" to try to maintain the atomic monopoly, since it would only force Russia into a crash program.[116] Morgenthau warned the State Department in January 1945 that Moscow must be assured that America was not using Germany as a possible future ally against Russia.[117] Stimson also told the department that month that the trusteeship question for Pacific islands should not be broached with Moscow since it would "provoke a sense of distrust" and "call marked attention to our aims."[118] Nevertheless, U.S efforts to revive Germany and to control the islands were soon underway.

Truman understood the dangers. After berating Molotov on 23 April, he asked Davies whether he had gone too far. Davies spoke of the dangers of being too firm. Soviet foreign policy was driven by "fear of a hostile world," which, given recent history, was "abundantly justified." Truman sympathized, noting the many times Russia had been invaded. Davies argued that unless cooperation obtained, the United States would have to expect and prepare for a war in the near future. Truman "agreed entirely" that peace required a foundation of trust. Davies told him to keep fighting for peace. "Your conference with Molotov commanded their respect. You must now command their confidence in our good will and fairness."[119]

That Truman accepted this advice, and built it into his two-track strategy, is clear.[120] By mid-May he sent Hopkins to Moscow. He also sent Davies to explain his policy to Churchill, specifically why U.S. troops would be withdrawn from the Soviet occupation zones. The selection of Davies was deliberate. Since Davies was known to be sympathetic to the Soviets, sending him would end rumors that America and Britain were "ganging up" on Russia.[121]

Davies became one of Truman's most important confidants over the next few months. One of a select few invited by the president to Potsdam, he warned Byrnes just before the first meeting that to secure peace it was critical "to see the other fellow's point of view" specifically that "the first and dominant [Soviet] purpose . . . is their physical security."[122] By 29 July, as we have seen, Byrnes was convinced the bomb would control the peace. Davies warned him against this view. If the Russians felt excluded from atomic cooperation, "it would engender bad feeling—possible hostility, and ultimately a race in . . . armaments, which would culminate in the annihilation of one or the other [great powers], or perhaps both."[123]

The fact that Byrnes used Davies's idea on the Polish border question to end the conference on a cooperative note indicates that he did take some of Davies's concerns to heart.[124] This is also shown by a conversation on 1 August, when Byrnes told Davies of the impending atomic bombing of Japan. Davies asked whether this would not mean an atomic arms race. Byrnes agreed that it was "a serious danger." Given this, Davies argued,

the president should secure an understanding with Stalin now, since the bomb was an "immediate . . . threat to [Soviet] security." Without an agreement, compromise on all other matters might be impossible. Byrnes agreed, but felt he needed more time to consider the issue.[125] Byrnes's dilemma was clear. Unless there was a partnership on the bomb, Moscow would feel betrayed. Yet Byrnes also believed that sharing the atomic secret would mean foregoing a critical tool needed to contain Soviet growth.

Given these warnings, Truman and Byrnes hardly moved to containment ignorant of its possible effects. Yet while Davies's language is the bluntest, the belief that hard-line policies might irretrievably damage cooperation was shared by many. For this reason, atomic sharing became one of the most debated issues of containment in the fall 1945.[126] On 22 September, the day after a cabinet meeting on the subject, Truman wrote to his wife that he faced conflicting advice—those on the right arguing for secrecy; those on the left arguing for sharing scientific knowledge. Truman knew he was at a crossroads, that his decision "is probably the most momentous one I'll make."[127] Within a week, however, his sense of prudence led him to choose a policy of complete secrecy.

Byrnes later regretted this strategy and sought to offer more carrots while upholding the two-track policy. By late 1945, however, Truman seemed to accept that a modus vivendi was now impossible; he thus emphasized the stick. For Truman, a cold war was unwanted, but it was better than allowing U.S. power to fall. In a meeting with Stettinius in October, he commented that the failure of the foreign ministers' conference did not upset him, since this was bound to occur at the end of the war, and that it was "perhaps better to [have it] happen out in the open at this stage."[128] By early 1946, Truman's attention was focused not on saving the peace, but on gaining the support of the American people for containment. This included not only recruiting Churchill to give his famous iron curtain speech in March, but the using of public forums to highlight Soviet violations of the spirit of Yalta. Within a year, world and U.S. public opinion would be primed for the Truman Doctrine and the official start of the cold war.[129]

Stalin's Reaction to U.S. Policy and the Shift to Cold War

Although relatively few Soviet documents on the 1945–49 period have been released,[130] the extant evidence shows that U.S. policies did indeed undermine postwar cooperation. Needless to say, Stalin was a brutal dictator. Moreover, he was highly suspicious of western countries, given Russia's historical experience. But out of simple geopolitical self-interest, he wanted good relations with the west: he needed breathing space to rebuild his war-ravaged country.[131] Thus in 1945 he offered little support for local Communists in western Europe and Greece and allowed Czechoslovakia and Hungary a moderate degree of freedom. Over Austria, Stalin had been pushing for joint control, not Soviet occupation, since 1944. He also quickly shifted to demobilization and industrial conversion. From 11.4 million men in May, the Red Army was reduced by 3 million by the end of 1945; by late 1947, the army was down to 2.9 million.[132] The U.S. military saw this trend. An October 1945 report noted that demobilization would cut the Soviet army to 4.4 million by spring 1946. Most of the divisions were needed to occupy eastern Europe; only 20 were capable of being used outside the Soviet sphere. Thus Russia would likely "avoid the risk of a major armed conflict for 5 to 10 years, except for purely defensive purposes."[133]

Note also that Stalin was at his most accommodating just as Truman was solidifying his containment strategy. In June, Stalin accepted the UN Security Council voting formula so important to the U.S. secretary of state.[134] As Truman's diary entries indicate, Stalin was a tough bargainer at Potsdam, but hardly uncooperative. Even hard-liners noticed Soviet efforts to accommodate. Forrestal noted in June that Grew had achieved significant progress in recent discussions with Moscow. McCloy indicated that Stalin had been compliant in a number of areas, including agreeing to make no territorial claims against China.[135] Reports from the military in Germany affirmed that Soviet commanders were cooperating; the problem, in fact, was not the Russians, but the French.[136]

Soviet policy began to harden only after August, as the U.S. strategy became increasingly obvious. Soviet fears were most manifest in their efforts to prevent Japan's remilitarization. As Stalin told his advisers at the time, Moscow had to "keep Japan vulnerable from all sides, north, west, south, east, then she will keep quiet."[137] At the foreign ministers' conference in September, Byrnes was taken aback by Molotov's strong concern for Japan. The Soviets were upset by the unilateral decision excluding them from an occupation role. At the first meeting, Molotov noted that the Japanese question was not on the agenda, even though Britain had promised it would be. He later requested an Allied Control Council for Japan, noting that the task of destroying Japanese militarism could not be left to the United States alone. Japan's highly militarized industrial structure, he argued, was "likely to lead to the renewal of Japanese aggression in the near future."[138] Byrnes dismissed these concerns despite Harriman's warnings that the Soviets were clearly fearful that America was preparing to use Japan against them.[139] Byrnes told Molotov that he refused to consider the issue at this conference. He later acknowledged that his tough stand had been a primary cause of the breakdown of the conference.[140]

By October, Soviet anxiety was tangible. When Harriman met with Stalin on 25 October, Stalin was angry that Truman was still ignoring the Japanese question.[141] The next day he was more blunt: if Washington continued

to exclude the Soviets from the occupation, Moscow would pursue a "unilateral course" in Asia. In December, Byrnes offered a compromise. The Soviets were given a symbolic place on both the Far Eastern Commission in Washington (an advisory board to the U.S. occupation) and the smaller Allied Control Council in Japan (although MacArthur's decisions remained final).[142] Yet there is little doubt, as Harriman had warned, that U.S. resistance heightened Moscow's beliefs that Washington would use Japan as part of a broader policy to contain Russia.[143]

Although evidence on Stalin's response to other specific elements of containment is lacking, his negative reaction to Hiroshima is clear. Spies had revealed U.S. atomic research, but the demonstrated power of the bomb unnerved him. Just after Nagasaki, Stalin met with his top scientists and his commissar of munitions. He had one demand: with Hiroshima, the "equilibrium has been destroyed. Provide the bomb—it will remove a great danger from us."[144] As part of his overall policy of "catch up and overtake," Stalin proceeded to reorganize his country for this mission.[145]

As intended, the bomb gave the Russians new respect for American power. Two Russian scholars most familiar with the documents note that in August 1945 "the Americans vividly demonstrated to Stalin and many Russians that they could threaten the Soviet Union in the not-so-distant future." Thus, the "security belt of friendly regimes around the Soviet Union acquired a new urgency."[146] A scientist who helped develop the Soviet bomb recalled that "the Soviet government interpreted [Hiroshima] as atomic blackmail against the USSR, as a threat to unleash a new, even more terrible and devastating war."[147]

The American effort to shape the postwar peace through the implicit threat of atomic war had thus achieved more than mere containment. It had so frightened the Russians that all-out arms racing and cold war were now essentially inevitable. Truman of course had countenanced this eventuality. But as he noted in October, in the end the United States would stay ahead.

U.S. Strategic Planning, 1945–1950

In the last part of this chapter, I focus on one question: Why did Washington not initiate a preventive war against Russia in the late 1940s, when American strategic superiority was apparently at its height? I show that U.S. leaders and officials, despite active consideration of preventive war,[148] rejected it for two reasons, both supportive of this book's theory. First, the United States had superiority in both potential and especially economic power.[149] Hence, compared to Germany before the two world wars, there was far less reason to believe that any U.S. military decline would be both deep and inevitable. Arms racing could "prevent" such a decline. Second,

until the early 1950s, technical restrictions meant that the United States had too few atomic bombs to defeat Russia quickly and decisively in an all-out war. War plans consistently concluded that the west would have to sacrifice all of western Europe; a long, costly war would then follow in which Soviet surrender was far from assured. In short, containment was the better means to security: although it raised the likelihood of major war through inadvertence, it did not entail all the risks of actually choosing such a war. Security-maximizers are rational to choose major war only when no other feasible means of reversing decline exist.

American officials were well aware of Russia's ability to narrow the huge U.S. strategic advantage. A November 1945 military study predicted that as time went on, the Soviets would develop new weapons, including guided missiles, while improving their bomber force.[150] Another November analysis noted that, although the Soviet economy was weakened by the war, it possessed "tremendous war industrial potential." Since Moscow lacked an atomic bomb, however, it would not run the risk of a major war while rebuilding.[151]

Russia's potential for future military power was certainly unsettling. Yet all-out preventive war was not necessarily the best means to arrest its rise. That even the military saw arms racing from a position of U.S. economic superiority as a better first step is shown by a report on the atomic age written by the influential commanding general of the Manhattan project, General Groves. One version of the report was sent to the State Department in January 1946 to help shape civilian thinking. If the bomb could not be controlled by agreement, it argued, the world would enter into a vicious arms race. In such a race, the United States "must for all time maintain absolute supremacy in atomic weapons, including number, size and power, efficiency, means for immediate offense use and defense against atomic attack." Yet the report also seemed to temper the value of the arms-racing option.

> If we were truly realistic instead of idealistic, as we appear to be, we would not permit any foreign power with which we are not firmly allied, and in which we do not have absolute confidence to make or possess atomic weapons. If such a country started to make atomic weapons we would destroy its capacity to make them before it had progressed far enough to threaten us.

If Americans could be made aware of their true peril fifteen years later in a world of unrestricted atomic bombs, the report continued, they would demand one of two outcomes: either an agreement outlawing of atomic weapons forever or an exclusive U.S. monopoly. Since the latter, without the former, could only be achieved by war, the memorandum strongly implied that the Pentagon favored preventive war should diplomacy fail.[152]

Yet this was not the military's complete view. Groves's report to the civilians was taken word-for-word from an updated version of JCS 1477, a study of the impact of atomic weapons on national security.[153] Since JCS 1477 was for internal purposes, however, it contained the following passage excised from the civilian version. After noting that mutual trust was an essential requirement for an enforceable U.S.-Soviet agreement, JCS 1477 explained that "this will not be easy to obtain. Realistically, the second alternative [preventive war] will be equally difficult to achieve. Therefore, let us consider the probable effect on our armies of the future of an unrestricted atomic armaments race."[154] In short, the military did not tell the civilians that it had already concluded that decisive preventive war was simply too hard to achieve, and thus that arms racing was the most realistic means to security. The omission was no doubt deliberate. Pentagon officials likely worried that more dovish civilians might use any argument against preventive war to reject the course altogether, even if declining conditions later required this extreme step. Leaving preventive war in as a plausible alternative thus preserved U.S. options. Still, both the report to the State Department and JCS 1477 made clear that arms racing was the least of three evils considered. As the final sentences in both documents stated: "If there are to be atomic weapons in the world, we must have the best, the biggest, and the most."

January 1946 was thus a critical point in the decision against preventive war. Although calls for preventive war would continue for another fifteen years,[155] military planners realized that such a war, rather than being immoral, was simply infeasible. Every war plan created within the next five years showed that in the event of major war the Soviets would overrun Europe. This would force America to fight a long war from England, the Azores, and North Africa. Given these distances, and given the strong Soviet air-defense system, it would be very difficult to achieve a decisive victory.[156] Added to the problem was the small number of atomic bombs: until the successful "Sandstone" tests of the late 1940s, the United States had no way to mass-produce the weapon; in 1948, there were still only fifty bombs in the arsenal.[157] Set against an arms race founded on American economic preponderance, initiating major war was clearly not the rational means to security.

One might still wonder why, after the surprise Soviet atomic test in August 1949, Washington did not move immediately to preventive war. Preventive war was one of four alternatives considered as part of the NSC-68 process in early 1950. Yet once again, American leaders understood the rational choice: the U.S. economy was so preponderant that by simply spending more on the military, the United States could maintain military superiority.[158]

The shock of the Soviet test pushed the State Department's Policy Planning Staff into action in the fall of 1949. Its two key members were Kennan and Paul Nitze (until Kennan's departure in January 1950). At a PPS meeting in October, Kennan laid out the key question: "Are we holding our own?" Secretary of State Acheson stressed that the issue of future trends had to be studied carefully.[159] At a follow-up meeting in December, both Kennan and Nitze emphasized the importance of increasing conventional forces in Europe to prevent the Soviets from gaining the potential power of the area.[160]

One pillar of NSC-68's final recommendations grew out of this logic. The United States, to uphold preponderance, would need to deter Soviet territorial expansion and thus growth in Soviet potential power. For this, large-scale conventional military spending was required. The other pillar—massive increases in nuclear weaponry—was shaped by analyses from the Joint Chiefs and the CIA in early 1950. A 9 February JCS report argued that although the Soviets would gradually narrow the strategic gap, the overall power balance still favored the western camp—not only because of America's superior nuclear capability but also the superior Allied economic potential in support of a global major war.[161] The next day, the CIA issued a report that supported a nuclear buildup but also offered a warning. The Soviets were driven by fear. Overzealous steps to improve the U.S. position might cause them to believe the west was planning to attack Russia, which in turn might lead the Kremlin to launch a preemptive war.[162] Preventive war was thus quite unappealing versus the arms-racing option. Aside from the likelihood of an indecisive outcome, the very act of preparing for such a war could lead to a Soviet preemptive strike.

The arguments since autumn 1949 for a stronger containment posture culminated in NSC-68, presented to Truman in April 1950. The document was driven by the overarching belief that if America did not act soon to maintain its military preponderance, the Soviet Union might overtake it. Fortunately, the United States had four times the Soviet GNP. All Americans had to do, therefore, was to "summon up the potential within ourselves" and translate it into the military strength needed for a more vigorous containment policy.

The last part of the document considered four possible courses of action: continuation of current policies, isolation, preventive war, and an accelerated buildup of political, economic, and military strength. The fourth was chosen as the one best able to reverse the present trends and to maximize U.S. security. Continuing present policies or isolation would only allow Russia to dominate Eurasia, thus giving it "a potential far superior to our own."

The document recognized that in light of history the argument for preventive war made a powerful case. The argument fell apart on purely realist grounds, however: it was based on the faulty assumption that the United States could launch a decisive attack or win a long war. Atomic

blows alone, however, would not cause the Kremlin to capitulate, and Russia would then go on to dominate most of Eurasia. Moral considerations are also noted, but even here the document's argument was purely expedient: the shock of U.S. responsibility for the war would make it difficult to establish a satisfactory international order after the war was over. Hence, even a military victory would not bring the United States closer to victory in the conflict with Communism.

In maximizing security, therefore, preventive war was inferior to the fourth option: using U.S. superiority in economic/potential power to maintain military dominance. The goal therefore was to construct "a successfully functioning political and economic system in the free world backed by adequate military strength." This would "postpone and avert the disastrous situation which, in light of the Soviet Union's probable fission bomb capability and possible thermonuclear bomb capability, might arise in 1954 on a continuation of our present programs."[163]

In sum, NSC-68 reflected two aspects of the theory's logic for bipolar systems. First, what drove the United States to accelerate the cold war rivalry after 1950 was the prospect of continued military decline in the absence of new, stronger action by Washington. Second, U.S. superiority in all three dimensions of power—military, economic, and potential—was critical to the sense of optimism regarding the future, notwithstanding current negative trends. In short, the United States possessed the strength to reverse the trends. In such circumstances, arms racing and economic revitalization are always more rational than preventive war.

As a postscript, it is worth noting that internal discussions of the merits of preventive war did not end in 1950. In 1953, President Eisenhower authorized a policy reappraisal, code-named Solarium, which had as one of its three alternatives preventive war.[164] In September, Eisenhower wrote a confidential letter to Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, observing that if America could not stay ahead of Russia, his duty to future generations might require initiating war "at the most propitious moment that we could designate."[165] Fortunately, by October, presentations to Eisenhower made clear that arms racing could indeed uphold U.S. nuclear superiority.[166] We can be thankful that Eisenhower, like Truman, did not opt for preventive nuclear war. But their reason for not doing so had little to do with democratic morality and almost everything to do with U.S. superiority in economic and potential power. So while German leaders earlier in the century had seen that decline would be deep and inevitable in the face of Russian industrialization, the United States had the luxury of being able to arms race its way to long-term security.

This chapter supports the book's contention that dynamic trends drive states to adopt policies that increase the chance of major war, all in order to

reduce their prospects for long-term decline. American officials were more than aware of the Soviet system's capacity for evil, particularly against its own citizens. Yet significantly, Washington moved to containment even before it had determined the Kremlin's foreign policy intentions, and even though Truman and Byrnes saw Stalin as a businesslike geopolitician.

Contrary to traditionalists and classical realists, containment and the cold war were not results of a delayed American awakening to Soviet aggressive intentions. Nor were they, as revisionists and some liberal scholars argue, reflections of American greed or domestic economic structure. The U.S. policy-makers acted for national security, even as they saw the Soviets doing the same. Yet the postrevisionist view, which parallels aspects of neorealism, is also insufficient. This was not simply a spiral of misunderstanding fueled by the zero-sum nature of bipolarity. Bipolarity mattered, but because of dynamic trends. It was fear of decline in economic and potential power that compelled U.S. leaders to limit Moscow's consolidation of its realm and to prevent revolution in western Europe. Neorealism, which remains underspecified in its analysis of dynamic trends, cannot explain when bipolar systems will move from relative calm to intense rivalry and crisis. But the spiral-model aspect of postrevisionism is also incomplete in its understanding of the initial impulse to containment (even if it helps explain the subsequent action-reaction cycle). American policy-makers chose containment in mid-1945 not because they saw the Soviets as hostile in the near term—they knew the Kremlin wanted peace to rebuild after a devastating war. The fear was of the future: the authoritarian nature of the Soviet system meant that an expansionistic Napoleon-like character might wreak havoc down the road, if Russia was allowed to gain more power.[167] Restricting Soviet growth was thus a prudent step, even if it meant a heightened risk of inadvertent war.

A full explanation for the jump into cold war requires a different theoretical perspective. By separating power into three dimensions, dynamic differentials theory shows how fear of decline in economic and potential power led to such hard-line policies in the military realm. Containment served to protect the U.S. lead in economic/potential power, even at the cost of a hostile rivalry. Yet since the United States started the rivalry with superior economic/potential power, American leaders could hold off on preventive war until they saw whether arms racing and containment would indeed maintain U.S. military preponderance. The strategy helped "prevent" the kind of deep and inevitable decline that had, in the past, led other bipolar systems into total wars for survival. This suggests counterfactually that had the United States started in 1945 with the same military power but only the territorial mass of the original thirteen colonies, for example, American confidence in the future might have been closer to that of German leaders prior to the two world wars.