

because these problems, in one form or another, seem to arise every day and most of them straighten out as in the case of the Berne meeting. We must be firm, however, and our course thus far is correct." 49

The very fact that the Berne incident could be resolved gave Roosevelt new hope that his foreign policy would work in the postwar period. But the problems were getting ever more complicated. The postwar world was at hand, questions could not be deferred, the unifying factor of the common enemy would soon be gone.

There remained, moreover, the considerable gap between Roosevelt's *foreign* foreign policy and his *domestic* foreign policy. It would take enormous skill to be the realist and the idealist at the same time; and Roosevelt, the self-styled realist, certainly knew that. When it was suggested by an aide that he could appear at the upcoming planning meeting for the United Nations Organization in San Francisco and dispel problems with a "wave of the magic wand," he wearily replied that he doubted whether he still had such a wand to wave.

And there were other considerations. The Yalta axioms were very much the personal possession of Roosevelt and a few powerful independent agents, whose only loyalty was to him. Those axioms had no institutional base in the government; in a sense, their very emphasis on high-level personal contacts, outside of bureaucratic channels, precluded that. Certainly they were not popular in the State Department.

What the State Department thought, however, was not very significant so long as Roosevelt was there to set boundaries, not merely through his prerogative to approve or reject, but also by his presidential powers to promote or exile, to set questions, to give attention or inattention. In September 1944, Cadogan had remarked of Roosevelt in his diary, "A lot turns on his health." In the note FDR himself had scribbled to his wife on February 12, his last day at Yalta, the President had added, "I'm a bit exhausted, but really all right."

Two months later, on April 12, 1945, several hours after drafting that last cable to Churchill — "I would minimize the general Soviet problem" — Roosevelt complained of a terrific headache and collapsed. Later in the day he was dead.⁵⁰

In every authoritarian state, political life too readily becomes a struggle for access to the ruler and for the control of his sources for information.

— GEORGE KENNAN, September 1944¹

III

The World Bully

"WE SHALL NOT KNOW what he is really like until the pressure begins to be felt," General George C. Marshall said to Secretary of War Henry Stimson as the two rode back to the Pentagon after their first White House conference with the new President. Harry Truman was as shocked as anybody by the turn of fate. "I've really had a blow since this was dictated," he wrote on April 13 as a postscript to a letter he had begun a day earlier, while presiding over the Senate before the news of Roosevelt's death had reached him. "But I'll have to meet it."²

In those first days, the men who had served Roosevelt could do little more than speculate about the unknown Missourian who had succeeded the war leader.

"No one knows what the new President's views are — at least I don't," Stimson observed. "The threads of information were so multitudinous that only long previous familiarity could allow him to control them."

"The man has a lot of nervous energy, and seems to be inclined to make very quick decisions," noted Treasury Secretary Henry Morgenthau, Jr. "But, after all, he is a politician, and what is going on in his head only time will tell."

Commerce Secretary Henry A. Wallace, walking through Truman's car on the Roosevelt funeral train, caught sight of the new President

sitting with Edwin Pauley, a California oil man and major contributor to the Democratic Party who, as director of the 1944 Democratic Convention, had helped devise the machinations that won the vice-presidential nomination for Truman. No doubt with some jealousy and resentment toward the man who had taken his place as Vice President, Wallace mused that “an era of experimental liberalism had come to an end” and wondered what Pauley and others of that ilk “would do to the putty which is Truman.”³

But Wallace was underestimating Truman, who was a man of strong and defined character. “It did not take long to see through the mask of his self-deprecation,” observed Jonathan Daniels, who worked as press secretary during the first days of transition. On subjects on which Truman was not informed, however, he could be molded; and on one subject above all — foreign affairs — he was woefully uninformed. He had not even been abroad since Army service in the First World War. Harry Hopkins, closer to the new President than any other member of Roosevelt’s entourage, worried that Truman “knows absolutely nothing of world affairs.”

Truman was the first to admit his own ignorance. “They didn’t tell me anything about what was going on here,” he complained forlornly, but with some justice, more than a month after the succession. He had been chosen as Vice President as a compromise, in order that Roosevelt would not have to choose between two more experienced men, James Byrnes and Henry Wallace. After the election, he was treated rather as a hired hand; he was to sit unobtrusively in the Senate and mind his own business. As Vice President, Truman apparently conferred with Roosevelt just twice.*

If FDR had acted differently, if he had admitted Truman into policy councils, he might have felt that he was making an unpleasant admission about his own sense of mortality. Of course, there was

* Some sense of the relationship between the two men is suggested by Roosevelt’s instructions to Truman regarding communications during the Yalta Conference: “If you have any urgent messages which you wish to get to me, I suggest you send them through the White House Map Room [communications center]. However, only *absolutely urgent* messages should be sent via the Map Room. May I ask that you make them as brief as possible in order not to tie up communications. If you have very lengthy messages the Map Room officer will have to exercise his discretion as to whether it is physically possible to send them by radio or whether they will have to be sent by pouch.” Two and a half months later, in what may have been his last contact with Roosevelt, Truman wrote to FDR at Warm Springs: “Hope you are having a good rest. Hate to bother you but I have a suggestion to make.” It concerned appointments for federal loan administrator and postmaster general.

precious little time in which to bring Truman into the foreign policy process; Roosevelt spent less than a month in Washington during the eighty-two days that made up his last administration.⁴

Still, one of the strongest criticisms that the historian can make of Roosevelt’s tenure in the presidency is the manner in which he left it, with his chosen successor a domestic politician, inexperienced and uninformed about foreign relations, facing one of the great turning points in modern history: the replacement of the European-dominated international system by a global system. To make matters more difficult, U.S. foreign policy at this time depended very much on Roosevelt himself, and on his complicated effort to pursue two contradictory lines at once — Wilsonianism for domestic opinion, and realism in Great Power relations.

Truman’s difficult inheritance points up a problem of presidential transition. Candidates for the presidency often choose their running mates on grounds of political utility, not of experience and ability, and then, if their campaigns are successful, assign their Vice Presidents peripheral and routine tasks. An abrupt transition, like that which occurred in April 1945, leaves the new President with the urgent need to demonstrate continuity; re-establish public confidence and international credibility; convince senior officials appointed by and loyal to the former President (as well as members of Congress, the press, even himself) that he now is *the* President; gather together those “multitudinous threads of information”; make a judgment about whose opinion to accept and whose to reject so that he can understand what has actually been happening — and then make the required decisions. In other words, he must try to become President in fact as well as in name. So Truman struggled through much of 1945. That effort helped shape an incipient Soviet-American confrontation and gave increasing substance to the new idea of national security.

Harry Truman was born in 1884 into a devout Baptist family. They lived on a farm for a couple of years, and then in 1890 moved to Independence, Missouri, a few miles to the east of Kansas City. An unusual ailment, colloquially known as “flat eyeballs,” forced Truman to start wearing thick glasses at the age of five, and so kept him out of boyhood games and turned him into a voracious reader. His-

tory became his lifelong love, in particular, the biographies of great men and military chronicles. Even as a practicing politician later in life, he would sometimes be reading five or six different books at once. Rejected by both West Point and Annapolis because of his vision, he worked for a time as a bank clerk, then returned to the physical rigors of the family farm. He only left it at the age of thirty-four to fight in France during World War I. The camaraderie of Army life and the pleasure he took in being Captain Truman changed his course. He came home determined to do something more with his life than farm. His first venture, a men's clothing store, failed in the postwar depression. He turned to politics. A fiercely loyal Democrat, he won election as a veterans' candidate to the administrative position of judge in Jackson County. He was more an ally of the political machine of Tom Pendergast than a member; but when he came to the United States Senate in 1935, at the age of fifty, he had to endure the humiliation of being thought merely an errand boy for the Kansas City boss. He wore off the label by hard work, and his conviviality won him membership in the Senate's inner club. National prominence came when he proved to be a very effective chairman of a Senate committee that investigated defense industries during World War II.

Unlike Roosevelt, Truman was no renegade, but very much a traditional Wilsonian. While still in the Senate, he played a key role in getting that body to endorse America's postwar participation in the United Nations.⁵ The ideas of spheres of influence and a Big Power peace were abhorrent to him. Truman, himself part of the great public consensus, had no idea that Roosevelt had been speaking two languages, nor did he know that aspects of Russian behavior in Eastern Europe were in response to Roosevelt's Great Power diplomacy. Truman could not believe that Russia's quest for security had a rationality; he had to ask himself who could threaten the Soviet Union. Certainly he could not entertain doubts about American intentions. When he was finally confronted with foreign policy questions, all he had as background was his storybook view of history and a rousing Fourth of July patriotism. He tended to see clearly defined contests between right and wrong, black and white. Neither his personality nor his experience gave him the patience for subtleties and uncertainties. Truman admitted that he was "not up on all details" and was trying "to catch the intricacies of our foreign affairs," but he

recognized that the nation and the world demanded reassurance, and he was determined to assert himself.⁶

The way in which he caught up on foreign affairs, the people he listened to, the circuits through which information reached him, which problems gained his attention — all these would have an immediate and, in part, a transforming effect on policy. By the time of his first meeting with a high Soviet official, Truman had caught up enough to deliver a blistering rebuke to Molotov. What was said in that meeting on April 23 signified a major shift in American attitudes toward the Russians, a change that the Russians, engaged in their own calculations, could not miss. Truman had rejected the Roosevelt axioms in favor of a cluster of other assumptions, transitional ones, between the Yalta and Riga axioms, which reflected a general confusion and uncertainty about the objectives of the Soviet Union in world affairs. The Russians were thought to have taken advantage of American generosity, especially lend-lease; further, they supposedly were breaking solemn agreements. But if the Russians were treated firmly, according to these new axioms, they could be brought around. In other words, the Soviet Union could be made to accept a subsidiary role in the postwar world. This view focused on the Soviet Union as a state power, albeit a "world bully," rather than as the revolutionary state. It was an "open image"; the Soviet Union was susceptible to pressure and could be bargained with; its behavior could be modified.⁷ Truman had arrived at this assessment not by controlling the "threads of information" but by doing the only thing he could — accepting ideas formulated by those around him, then acting on them as his instinct, personality, and the situation dictated. Four sources were prominent.

Almost immediately on becoming President, Truman asked Admiral William Leahy to remain as Chief of Staff to the President and help him "pick up the strands of the business of war." An 1897 graduate of the Naval Academy, Leahy was a gruff, conservative, old-fashioned man, who was suspicious of all foreigners. Claiming expertise in the field of explosives, he was convinced, almost until it was dropped, that the atomic bomb would be a dud.

His distrust of the Soviet Union was total; communism was, for him, a dirty word, arousing "wrath and anger." At Yalta, he had

been a dissenter, prophesying that the result of the agreements would be to “make Russia the dominant power in Europe, which in itself carries certainty of future international disagreements and prospects of another war.” Leahy directed the preparation by the White House Map Room secretariat of the major briefing papers for the new President, with special emphasis on Poland and the secret surrender dispute involving German troops in northern Italy. In presenting them to Truman, on April 19, Leahy concentrated on Stalin’s “insulting language” during the secret surrender, and was pleased to note that Stalin’s cables affronted the President’s “solid old-fashioned Americanism.” Leahy left the meeting confident that his new pupil would take a “strong line” at the upcoming talks with “Molly.”⁸

The second influential source was the embassy in Moscow, in particular, Ambassador W. Averell Harriman, who proved to be one of Truman’s most admired mentors. While still a college senior, he was elected a director of the Union Pacific Railroad, which had been built up by his father, the tycoon E. H. Harriman. During the years between the two world wars, the younger Harriman occupied himself with international banking (including a brief investment in a vast manganese concession in the Soviet Union, which led to a fleeting acquaintance with Trotsky) and with becoming a polo player of some repute. In 1941, when Harriman was forty-nine, Franklin Roosevelt chose him as a special envoy, first to go to London to oversee the economic lifeline between the United States and Great Britain, later to Moscow as United States ambassador. In that latter post, he almost surely saw Stalin more often than any other American ever did, before or after. He puzzled the Russians a bit. “How can a man with a hundred million dollars look so sad?” Maxim Litvinov once asked one of Harriman’s colleagues.

When he first undertook the Moscow assignment, Harriman believed that the Russians would collaborate in the postwar world despite behavior “crude and abhorrent to our standards.” In March 1944, he wrote, “In spite of the conjectures to the contrary, there is no evidence that he [Stalin] is unwilling to allow an independent Poland to emerge.” By the late summer of 1944, however, the ambassador had lost much of his optimism. Difficulties in the military aid program had always troubled him, but the real turning point came when Stalin refused to cooperate in delivering aid to the Polish underground during the Warsaw uprising that began in August. Har-

riman concluded that the Russians were cynically waiting for the Germans to kill off troublesome anti-Soviet, Western-oriented Poles before moving themselves. “I am for the first time since coming to Moscow gravely concerned by the attitude of the Soviet Government,” he cabled Washington. “These men are bloated with power . . . They expect they can force acceptance of their decisions without question upon us and all countries.”⁹

At this time the ambassador was much influenced by George Kennan, who had joined the embassy in 1944.* Harriman spent long periods talking to and learning from his new charge, “batting out flies,” in his own phrase, sleeping on questions, then resuming the discussions the next day in an effort to find some explanations for the continually “perplexing developments” in Soviet policy.¹⁰

This is not to say that the two men saw eye to eye. Kennan, as he later recalled, already favored “a full-fledged and realistic showdown with the Soviet Union” over Eastern Europe.¹¹ If the West was not willing, he wrote to Bohlen at the time of Yalta, “to go whole hog” to frustrate the Soviet Union, then the only thing to do was partition Germany, divide the Continent into spheres, and determine “the line beyond which we cannot afford to permit the Russians to exercise unchallenged power or to take purely unilateral action.” This point of view evolved into what became known as the containment doctrine. Kennan urged Ambassador Harriman to accept explicitly a division into spheres, and to do what he could to marshal American opinion against the new enemy. But, in December 1944, Kennan concluded a memorandum to Harriman, “I know you do not see these things as blackly as I do, and that you will probably not share these views.”¹²

What Harriman saw was not a revolutionary state but a bully on the international scene; and, while Kennan thought Soviet goals were immutable, Harriman believed that the Russians could be made to play a different game. “I have been conscious since early in the year of a division among Stalin’s advisers on the question of cooperation with us,” he wrote Harry Hopkins in September 1944. “It is now my feeling that those who oppose the kind of cooperation we expect have recently been getting their way.” His crucial point:

* Despite his identification with the George Kennan who was his namesake, cousin of his grandfather, and explorer of Russia, this George Frost Kennan misses in his memoirs a most curious connection — the elder George Kennan in 1922 published a two-volume biography of Averell Harriman’s father.

"Unless we take issue with the present policy there is every indication the Soviet Union will become a world bully wherever their interests are involved." And the solution? "I am convinced that we can divert this trend but only if we materially change our policy toward the Government . . . I am not going to propose any drastic action but a firm and friendly *quid pro quo* attitude." He also indicated his own mood: "I am disappointed but not discouraged. The job of getting the Soviet Government to play a decent role in international affairs is, however, going to be more difficult than we had hoped."¹³

Yet Harriman continued to be of two minds; Soviet cooperation was possible, although he defined cooperation to include Russian subservience to the American system or, as he put it, "our concepts." For him, "spheres of influence" was "the unpopular term."

"Averell is a bit of a weather-cock," the British ambassador in Moscow had noted, and Harriman now swung closer to Kennan's views, agreeing that American leaders needed to be alerted to a crisis at hand. He intensified his warnings about the need for a tougher stand. "I do not believe that I have convinced the President of the importance of a vigilant, firm policy in dealing with the political aspects in various Eastern European countries," Harriman regretfully noted after seeing Roosevelt back in Washington in November 1944, though he found the State Department "fully alive to this necessity."

In the early months of 1945, especially after Yalta, during the difficulties over the Balkans and the formation of a new Polish government, he became almost frantic. "The war is going wonderfully well again now," Harriman's daughter Kathleen wrote from Moscow to her sister on March 8, 1945. "But the news is slightly dampened here by our gallant allies who at the moment are being most bastard-like. Averell is very busy — what with Poland, PWs and, I guess, the Balkans. That house is full of running feet, voices and phones ringing all night long — up until dawn." But Roosevelt continued to reject Harriman's interpretation, and refused his request that he be allowed to return home to report personally on deteriorating relations.¹⁴

The President's death and Stalin's consequent decision to send Molotov to the San Francisco Conference gave Harriman an occasion to return to Washington to argue his case, as well as an opportunity

to establish his position with the new President. Flying west over the Atlantic, he managed to beat Molotov by two days; the latter took a safer route, by way of Siberia and Montana.

Harriman arrived on his Paul Revere mission, nervous, with a tic in his right eye, fearing that a break was at hand, but convinced that the alarm had to be sounded. "Russian plans for establishing satellite states are a threat to the world and us," he informed State Department officials, adding that the United States had "great leverage," especially in the form of economic aid. He warned Navy Secretary James Forrestal that "we might well have to face an ideological crusade just as vigorous and dangerous as Fascism or Nazism." He told the new President that the United States faced a "barbarian invasion of Europe." The theme caught on. "The Soviet Union's interpreting our attitude as a sign of weakness," warned Assistant Secretary of State Nelson Rockefeller, was being "mirrored in many Latin American countries, where governments were losing their respect for the United States for giving in to the Russians so frequently."

His trip home had accomplished Harriman's personal goal: to assure himself continued direct access to the White House and to strengthen his relations with the new President. But his success did not please everyone in the State Department. "I am burned up with the way in which Harriman has been acting," Secretary of State Stettinius complained on April 22. "He went to see the President without any of us knowing about it and has not reported to anyone yet what took place."¹⁵

Edward R. Stettinius, Jr., had become board chairman of United States Steel when he was thirty-eight. He was a bluff, handsome man with prematurely white hair, a big smile, and very white teeth. (Latin American diplomats often called him *Los Dientes*, "the Teeth.") He was regarded with some affection, but not with great respect, by many in the State Department, where he was known as Big Brother Ed. Roosevelt, in order further to concentrate power in his own hands, had deliberately chosen the weak Stettinius as successor to Hull at the end of 1944. The new Secretary could preside skillfully at meetings, and possessed a keen eye for public relations and cleanliness, but did not have much of a mind for diplomacy. How seriously could others take a Secretary who seemed more concerned that messages to the President be typed on the State Depart-

ment's special large-character typewriter than with the content of the messages, who enthusiastically urged FDR to set aside an hour every Wednesday to take tea with "incoming and outgoing" foreign and American ambassadors?

Because Roosevelt's death put Stettinius first in the line of succession, his days as Secretary were numbered.¹⁶ Nevertheless, at this point, Stettinius retained influence. As the principal channel between Truman and the State Department, he transmitted the Department's institutional concerns to the President. An initial briefing memorandum on April 13 informed Truman: "Since the Yalta Conference, the Soviet Government has taken a firm and uncompromising position on nearly every major question." But Stettinius had shared in the Yalta optimism, and still looked forward to the United Nations extravaganza he was producing, which was to open shortly in San Francisco. He moderated to some degree the attitude of the career officers. Stettinius and H. Freeman Matthews, director of the Office of European Affairs in the State Department, agreed on the following conclusion: "A spectacular change from the mood of the Conference to the more recent developments of an unfavorable nature can be explained on the basis of political leaders whom Stalin had to advise on his return to Moscow. These leaders may well have told Stalin that he had 'sold out' at Yalta. They are the equivalent of our isolationists." Both Stettinius and Matthews continued to hold a favorable image of Stalin himself. Matthews said that Stalin was the only dictator he had ever seen who had a sense of humor.¹⁷

As the war in Europe was coming to an end, the British argued that a more forceful line had to be taken toward the USSR. Poland was not only a question of "honor," as Churchill had said at Yalta; it was also his obsession. Whatever Churchill's optimism after Yalta, a combination of factors — the Soviet position, domestic political pressures, stubbornness on the part of the London Poles — quenched it.¹⁸

Roosevelt's death gave Churchill an opportunity to reassert his views; he wasted no time. Truman, susceptible to Churchill's great prestige, was more likely than the former President to accept the Prime Minister's interpretation. "It is important to strike a note of our unity of outlook and action at the earliest moment," Churchill wired immediately. Anthony Eden, on his way to San Francisco, stopped in Washington to size up the new President and share what

Churchill modestly described as "our impressions of what is actually happening in Moscow and Warsaw." Eden saw Truman twice, and they quickly came to an understanding on the Polish question. The Foreign Secretary declared that Anglo-American relations had never been closer; he had successfully conveyed to his receptive listener the British position that the Soviet Union had to be "brought up sharply against realities" and made to recognize "Anglo-American strength."¹⁹

Truman's attitude — and, finally, the attitude of the United States government — toward the Soviet Union was a compilation and extraction of the views urged on him from four sources: Leahy, Harri-man, Stettinius, and Churchill. Yet their views were not the only ones being fed into the Oval Office. Truman also heard from individuals who had functioned as special agents for Roosevelt. The very fact that they were associated with no bureaucracy or organization had appealed to the late President, who appreciated that each of them, to one degree or another, shared his ideas on Soviet relations. Harry Hopkins told Truman that Stalin "is a forthright, rough, tough Russian . . . He can be talked to frankly." Hopkins, however, was desperately sick; he had left his bed in the Mayo Clinic only when he received the devastating news from Warm Springs. Although he talked with Truman about his observations, he was in no position to argue against the views of the others. Joseph Davies, too, was in the hospital and did not see Truman for some time after the accession.²⁰ Bernard Baruch — "that old Pooh-bah," as Roosevelt once called him²¹ — sent Truman a memorandum in which historian D. F. Fleming, sketching briefly Russian-Western relations since the revolution, advised American leaders at least to try to understand the Soviet viewpoint. There is no indication that Truman took the time to read the paper. In any case, the advice would have been drowned out by what he was hearing in his immediate circle.²²

The only serious dissenter who could make himself heard was War Secretary Henry Stimson. Unlike most others, he was not an advocate of either the United Nations or of America's global mission. Nor was he convinced of the unavoidable enmity of the United States and the USSR. He stood closest to Roosevelt's own concept of a Great Powers peace. In December 1944 and January 1945, he warned Roosevelt and Stettinius that it was unrealistic to proceed with an international organization before securing understanding

among the Great Powers. Both Stimson and Roosevelt recognized that the interests of the USSR in its border regions would take precedence — inevitably, however unpalatably to the U.S. — over the interests of other states; the two men, unlike many other policymakers, could substitute what might be called a Mexican analogy for that of Munich. That is, they could understand how uncomfortable the U.S. would feel if Mexico were to become a potential ally for another Great Power. Not checked by domestic political considerations as Roosevelt was, Stimson could be explicit.²³

In early May 1945, he talked over the telephone with Assistant Secretary of War John McCloy, then in San Francisco:

Stimson: I think that it's not asking too much to have our little region over here which never has bothered anybody

McCloy: Yes

Stimson: outside it, and retain — uh — less easily called upon right to intervene abroad

McCloy: Yes, yes

Stimson: I mean we don't go abroad unless there's a world war . . . The thing should be pared out so that we are not immersed in what I used to call the local troubles of Europe

McCloy: Yes . . .

Stimson: Well you don't think that Russia is going to give up her right to act unilaterally in those nations around her which she thinks so darned — are useful, like Romania and Poland and the other things — you don't think she's going to give that up do you?

McCloy: Uh, no, she will, no . . .²⁴

Stimson worried that “some Americans are anxious to hang on to exaggerated views of the Monroe Doctrine and at the same time bite into every question that comes up in Central Europe.”²⁵ He had already noted in his diary on April 16: “Our respective orbits do not clash geographically and I think on the whole we can probably keep out of clashes in the future.” At all costs, he wanted to avoid stepping into the “Balkan mess.”²⁶

Stimson had only one opportunity to convey such views to President Truman, and that was during the Molotov visit. Molotov had come to pay his respects at the American embassy in Moscow in the

early morning hours of April 13, where a party had been stunned into silence by the news of Roosevelt's death. Stuttering from nervousness, Molotov spoke highly of the departed President, although, it seemed to some, with a certain economy, and then started asking questions about the unknown new President.²⁷ Now, just over a week later, he was in Washington for a crucial firsthand appraisal.

On his arrival, on Sunday, April 22, Molotov had a polite conversation with Truman. Another meeting was scheduled for late the next afternoon. Before the second meeting, on the morning of the twenty-third, Stettinius, equipped with “the essential paper” prepared by Elbridge Durbrow, assured the British that if no progress was made he would “mobilize the President to talk like a Dutch Uncle to Molotov.” In the middle of the afternoon, Stimson found himself unexpectedly summoned to an emergency meeting at the White House with Truman and his other senior advisers to prepare for the next meeting with Molotov. “Without warning, I was plunged into one of the most difficult situations I have ever had since I have been here,” Stimson noted in his diary.²⁸

Right from the beginning, the President structured the discussion, making clear his own views and indicating the responses he expected: “Our agreements with the Soviet Union so far had been a one-way street and that could not continue; it was now or never.” Truman said he intended to go on with the plans for San Francisco and “if the Russians did not wish to join us they could go to hell.”

Only then did the President seek advice. Most of the men echoed his words. “We had better have a showdown with them now than later,” said Navy Secretary Forrestal.

Although he was acutely embarrassed, Stimson did what he could to argue restraint. He thought it was State Department clumsiness and an American emphasis on “idealism” and “altruism,” rather than on “stark realities,” that had created the near crisis. Harriman and the American military representative, John Deane, had magnified small slights and irritations into major issues, and now Stimson saw the policymakers “rushing” headlong toward a break. In an effort to slow them down, if not bring them to a halt, he suggested several crucial points to be added to the calculations: Political democracy was not so easily grafted onto societies where no liberal tradition existed; only the United States and the United Kingdom “have a real idea of what an independent free ballot means.” He pointed out that

in the major military matters, the Russians had kept their word and the United States military authorities had come to count on it. In fact, "they had often been better than their promise." Poland was an unwise test case: "Without fully understanding how seriously the Russians took this Polish question we might be heading into very dangerous waters."

Then he pointed out one of the most important factors: "The Russians perhaps were being more realistic than we were in regard to their own security."

Stimson, however, was alone. Only Marshall agreed that the U.S. should avoid antagonizing the Russians, but his reasoning was more narrow: the Russians could delay entry into the Pacific war "until we had done all the dirty work." Admiral Leahy, though he argued against the Stimson position, did make a curious admission: "The Yalta agreement was susceptible to two interpretations."

Truman was obviously disappointed in Stimson's advice. He explained that he would make up his mind with Harriman, Leahy, and the State Department representative — and he said goodbye to Stimson, Forrestal, and the service chiefs.²⁹ But his mind was already cast by what he had heard in the previous eleven days. Passing lightly over the dissent of Stimson and Marshall, Admiral Leahy accurately summarized the prevailing sentiment: the United States should get tough. "It was the consensus of opinion of the conferees that the time had arrived to take a strong American attitude toward the Soviets, and that no particular harm can now be done to our war prospects even if Russia should slow down or even stop its war effort in Europe and Asia." The bully would be taught a lesson.

At about the same time, Molotov was seeing Joseph Davies. The Russian worried that "full information" might have died with Roosevelt and that "differences of interpretations and possible complications would arise which would not occur if Roosevelt lived." Davies, concerned that Truman "might rely on others" and make a "snap judgment," advised Molotov to ask for a chance to explain the Russian position.³⁰

Molotov saw the President at five-thirty on April 23. Struggling to follow Davies' advice in an unexpectedly tense situation, he tried to outline the Russian case, especially on the Polish question.

The President, however, was in no mood for ambiguities. Three days before, having discussed matters with Harriman and Stettinius,

he had declared: "We could not, of course, expect to get 100 percent of what we wanted," but he felt that "on important matters . . . we should be able to get 85 percent." Now, bent on obtaining that chunk, Truman brushed over Molotov's statement and instead lectured the Russian in what Leahy described as "plain American language." The Russians had to stick to their agreements, as interpreted in Washington. Relations could no longer be "on the basis of a one-way street."

Molotov turned white at the dressing down. "I have never been talked to like that in my life," he said.*

"Carry out your agreements and you won't get talked to like that," Truman replied curtly.³¹

Those who had urged their views on Truman were pleased by his performance. Leahy noted in his diary that the "President's strong American stand" left the Russians only two courses of action: "either to approach closely to our expressed policy in regard to Poland" or to drop out of the new international organization. He went on to add: "The President's attitude was more than pleasing to me, and I believe it will have a beneficial effect on the Soviet attitude toward the rest of the world. They have always known we have the power, and now they should know that we have the determination to insist upon the declared right of all people to choose their own form of government." On the same day, Eden had assured Churchill that "the new President is not to be bullied by the Soviets."³²

A stern lecture by the President of the United States to the Foreign Minister of the Soviet Union was hardly the cause of the Cold War. Yet that exchange did symbolize the beginning of the postwar divergence that led to confrontation. And it signaled to the ever-suspicious Russians that Roosevelt's policy might well be finished, and that, with the war in Europe ending, the Americans no longer needed the Russians, and might challenge their dominance in Eastern Europe. It also flashed a message to top U.S. officials that Truman was setting out on a course different from that of his predecessor.

Why this verbal confrontation? Especially, why over Poland? The

* "Knowing who his boss was," Adam Ulam writes of Molotov, "one must assume that the Soviet statesman was exaggerating."

Soviets had their own lessons about Russian security, painfully learned and obsessively held, to guide their thinking. Their entire strategic overview was based on vast land armies moving between Germany and Russia. They were not going to give up those Polish "gates," won with so much blood, to a group that Molotov characterized as "secretly an enemy" — and the London Poles would have had to agree with his characterization. Admiral Leahy had concluded his diary account on April 23 with an odd statement: "I personally do not believe it is possible to exclude dominant Soviet influence from Poland, but that it is possible to give the Government of Poland an external appearance of independence."³³ Did this concern for appearances mean that the Senate and public opinion were Truman's primary concern? No, for public opinion at that time held many diverse, contradictory strains; indeed, if anything, policymakers felt that the public was naïve and uninformed about the Soviet Union.

A primary reason was the inclination toward global involvement that now governed the reactions of many American leaders. It was not merely that Americans were concerned about the fate of the peoples of Eastern Europe, although that concern was there. In 1937, it will be recalled, the American minister in Riga, Arthur Bliss Lane, had described Eastern Europe, with the possible exception of Russia, as "perhaps the least important of all the areas in the world with which the United States has to deal." The intervening years had transformed the American mind. The American leaders no longer simply found dictatorship abhorrent; they felt *responsible* for what happened all over the world. They were gripped again by messianic liberalism, the powerful urge to reform the world that has been called Wilsonianism. They wanted a world safe both for liberal democracy and liberal capitalism. Why else had they joined the war against totalitarianism and tyranny? It was for the best of reasons, then, that they would oppose the Soviet Union on its Eastern European sphere. They were liberators, not imperialists.³⁴

There were those on both sides of the dispute in the policy councils who did not share this outlook, but for the most part it was very widely held. It was Harriman's view, and it was Truman's, and it was embodied in the great domestic Wilsonian consensus. Truman may well have thought he was carrying out Roosevelt's policies; he did not perceive that Roosevelt had bequeathed him a hand in a very

tricky game, that of playing off the domestic consensus against the Great Power consortium. Truman could not have seen it, for he was part of that domestic consensus.

And this is why Poland had become a test case, a test of Russian intentions: would the Soviets subscribe to the universal system (which was really an American system) or would they pursue a distinct strategy of their own? But the Americans had structured the test in such a way as to ensure negative results; they had chosen a poor question. For Russia, Stalin had emphasized at Yalta, Poland was "not only a question of honor but of security." This was practical arithmetic; not merely Stalinist Russia, but any great power, its armies in the field, would seek to assure itself of the orientation of its neighbors. It was unfortunate that only one major policymaker, and one who temperamentally could not be a Truman intimate, Henry Stimson, had pointed out that geographic propinquity should be weighed at least as carefully as universal principle. Some months earlier, reporting on Poland, Averell Harriman had declared, "I don't see how we can afford to stand aside without registering the strongest objections." That statement, alas, characterized America's part in deciding the fate of Eastern Europe. Postponement, alarm, outrage, vocal protest, commitment to the Atlantic Charter, identification with the position of the London Polish government, but also an absence of American forces — all these elements defined that role.³⁵

There was another aspect to this global stance. America's relation to the rest of the world was in the process of being reformulated. In place of the hoary terms "national interest" and "national defense," a new term that symbolized the reformulation was coming into use: "national security." Dangers did not have to be "clear and present" to be alarming. America's safety and security were also now measured by what took place far beyond its borders. World War II had been a close enough call. U.S. leaders dared not stand by and watch another dictator, another potential Hitler, step-by-step expand his realm and base of operations. The course of events in Poland, the Soviet sphere in Eastern Europe — these were seen to constitute immediate risks for the United States. "Russian plans for establishing satellite states are a threat to the world and to us," Harriman told State Department officials in April. "The Soviet Union, once it had control of bordering areas, would attempt to penetrate the next adjacent countries." And thus the United States had to make an issue

out of Poland and try to push back the Soviet sphere. "The issue ought to be fought out in so far as we could with the Soviet Union in the present bordering areas," added Harriman.³⁶

Truman might have responded differently, but was the victim of his own narrow references, and the needs cast upon him by his accession. "Whom would he rely on?" This was the question Joseph Davies had noted down on April 12; it was the question that inevitably occurred to every member of the old Roosevelt court. Truman, in his difficult situation, did the only thing he could — he listened to those whom he took to be Roosevelt's principal advisers, save for the obvious exception of the ailing Hopkins. In the middle of May, when he had begun to have second thoughts, he told Roosevelt's daughter, perhaps defensively, perhaps only plaintively, that all his advisers had urged him "to be hard with the Russians."³⁷

Franklin Roosevelt, who had appeared a permanent fixture of the national life, had died suddenly at a critical time in world affairs. People, including the new President himself, required reassurance. Truman had to prove himself, and that meant showing that he was tough, that he could not be pushed around, that he was decisive and in charge. Roosevelt tended to defer problems, to wait, to slide over them and around them. Truman much preferred a crisp solution. During his first weeks as President, many senior officials commented on the quick and self-assured way in which he seemed to make up his mind. But Henry Wallace was more perceptive than many others: "Truman's decisiveness is admirable. The only question is as to whether he has information behind his decisiveness to enable his decisions to stand up." A few weeks later he noted that Truman had been "very incisive and hard-boiled" at a Cabinet meeting. "This tendency toward an incisive and hard-boiled attitude has its advantages but sooner or later it will result in obscuring the truth and then there will be trouble."

Even Truman's friend, House Speaker Sam Rayburn, worried. He remarked approvingly on Truman's alacrity in making decisions, but added, "I am afraid one of these days he will make a decision based on inadequate information."³⁸

You don't know how difficult the thing has been for me. Everybody around here that should know anything about foreign affairs is out.

— HARRY TRUMAN, June 1945¹

IV

The Straight One-Two to the Jaw

ACROSS THE BOARD, policy reflected the new attitude — toward Indochina, Yugoslavia, and Japan, at the United Nations conference in San Francisco, and in the effort to use American economic power to discipline the errant Soviet state. Counterforce, however, brought not the desired effect but, instead, incipient confrontation; so Truman soon stepped back, toward the Yalta axioms and a composition of differences.

Many of the threads of information in these confusing weeks ran through the hands of one official, Undersecretary of State Joseph Grew, who oversaw day-to-day business in the Department during the long periods when Secretary Stettinius was attending conferences.

Acting Secretary for two thirds of the time from January into August of 1945, Grew had been in the Department forty-one years, ten of them as ambassador to Japan, including a half year of internment at the outbreak of World War II. The deeply conservative Grew suffered a hearing problem, which intensified the introversion that was part of his temperament. He had never forgiven the Bolsheviks for making their revolution, and retained an implacable hatred of the Soviet Union and communism. (One of his few consolations for having to mingle socially with the Russian ambassador while in Japan was being able to buy caviar at a little over two dollars a pound.)