



America's Global Involvement and the Emergence of the Cold War

It is logical that the United States should do whatever it is able to do to assist in the return of normal economic health in the world. . . . Our policy is directed not against any country or doctrine but against hunger, poverty, desperation and chaos. Its purpose should be the revival of a working economy in the world so as to permit the emergence of political and social conditions in which free institutions can exist.

SECRETARY OF STATE GEORGE C. MARSHALL

JUNE 5, 1947

It is clear that the main element of any United States policy toward the Soviet Union must be that of a long-term, patient but firm and vigilant containment of Russian expansive tendencies.

MR. X [GEORGE F. KENNAN]

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World War II plunged the United States into global affairs. By the end of 1941, the country had committed itself to total victory, and its involvement was to prove crucial to the war effort. However, because of its central importance to allied success, and its substantive involvement in international affairs, the United States found it difficult to change course in 1945 and revert to the isolationism of the past. To be sure, the first impulse was in this direction. Calls were heard for massive demobilization of the armed forces, cutbacks in the New Deal legislation of President Franklin Roosevelt, and other political and economic isolationism efforts.¹ Even so, at least three sets of factors militated against such a course and propelled the United States in the direction of global power:

- The global political and economic conditions of 1945 to 1947
- The decision of leading political figures within the United States to abandon isolationism after World War II
- Most important, the rise of an ideological challenge from the Soviet Union

In this chapter, we first examine these factors and how they led to the end of isolationism and the adoption of globalism. In turn, we set out the military, economic, and political dimensions of this new globalist involvement—falling under the rubric of the containment doctrine—and we discuss how it both became universal in scope and remained moral in content. As will be shown in Chapter 3, moreover, the containment doctrine produced a distinct set of American foreign policy values, beliefs, and actions.

THE POSTWAR WORLD AND AMERICAN INVOLVEMENT

The international system that the United States faced after the defeat of Germany and Japan was considerably different from any that it had in its history: The traditional powers of Europe were defeated or had been ruined by the ravages of war; the global economy had been significantly weakened; and the Soviet Union, a relatively new power equipped with a threatening ideology, had survived—arguably in better shape than any other European nation. Yet the United States was in a relatively strong political, economic, and military position, which seemed to imply the need for sustained U.S. involvement despite the nation's isolationist past.

Such a decision for involvement was made neither quickly nor automatically; rather, it seemed to come about over the course of several years and largely through the confluence of several complementary factors.

We begin our discussion with a brief description of three of these factors and suggest how they interacted to move the United States toward sustained global involvement.

The Global Vacuum: A Challenge to American Isolationism

The first important factor that contributed to America's decision to move away from isolationism was the **political and economic conditions of the international system immediately after World War II**. The land, the cities, and the homes, along with the economies, of most European nations had been devastated. Sizeable portions of the land had been either flooded, scorched, or confiscated. What land remained for cultivation was in poor condition, leading to widespread hunger and a flourishing black market in food. The industrial sectors of these nations, along with the major cities, were badly damaged or in total ruins. London, Vienna, Trieste, Warsaw, Berlin, Rotterdam, and Cologne, among others, bore the scars of war, and millions of people were homeless—by one estimate, 5 million homes had been destroyed, with many more millions badly damaged. In a word, Europe was a “wasteland.”²

European economies were weak, in debt, and driven by inflation. Britain, for example, had had to use up much of its wealth to win the war and, with a debt of about \$6 billion at war's end, was forced to rely on American assistance to remain solvent.³ France, the Netherlands, Belgium, and other European states were in no better shape, having to rely, in varying degrees, on American assistance to meet their financial needs. Foreign and domestic political problems also faced these states. Several British and French colonies were demanding freedom and independence. In Syria, Lebanon, Indochina, and later Tunisia, Morocco, and Algeria, for instance, indigenous movements were seeking independence from France. The British were confronted by independence efforts in India, Burma, Ceylon, Palestine, and elsewhere. Britain faced domestic austerity; and the French struggled at home with governmental instability and worker discontent. With such problems at home and abroad, neither country was in a position to assert a prominent role in postwar international politics.

The conditions in Germany and Italy further contributed to the political and economic vacuum in Europe. Both had been defeated, and Germany was divided and occupied. Italy was left with a huge budget deficit in 1945–1946 (300 billion lire by one estimate) as well as an extraordinarily high rate of inflation. Germany was in debt as well, owing nearly nine times what it had at the beginning of the war.⁴

Overall, Europe, which for so long had been at the center of international politics and for so long had shaped global order, was ominously weak, both politically and economically. For this reason, none of the traditional European powers seemed able to exert its traditional dominance in global politics. In contrast to postwar Europe, the United States was healthy and prosperous. Its industrial capacity was intact, and its economy was booming.

In the mid-1940s, the United States had growing balance-of-trade surpluses and huge economic reserves. For example, whereas Europe had trade deficits of \$5.8 billion and \$7.6 billion in 1946 and 1947, America in those years had trade surpluses of \$6.7 billion and \$10.1 billion. Furthermore, American reserve assets—about \$26 billion—were substantial and growing.⁵

The military might of the United States, too, seemed preeminent. American troops occupied Europe and Japan. The nation had the world's largest navy ("The Pacific and the Mediterranean had become American lakes," in the words of one historian⁶). And, of course, it alone had the atomic bomb. In this sense, then the country possessed the capacity to assume a global role. Moreover, the international environment seemed highly conducive to both the possibility and the necessity of America taking on a dominant role in global affairs.

American Leadership and Global Involvement

A second factor that encouraged the United States to abandon its isolationist strategy was the **change in worldview among American leaders** during and immediately after World War II. Most important was President Franklin Roosevelt's long-held conclusion that America's response to global affairs after World War I had been ill-advised and that such a response should not guide post-World War II foreign policy.⁷ Instead, Roosevelt had decided that continued American involvement in global affairs was necessary and, early on in the war, had revealed his vision of a future world order.

Roosevelt's Plan The first necessity in Roosevelt's plan was the total defeat and disarming of the adversaries, with no leniency shown toward aggressor states. Second was a renewed commitment by the United States and other countries to prevent future global economic depressions and to foster self-determination for all states. Third was the establishment of a global collective security organization with active American involvement. Finally, above and beyond these efforts, was Roosevelt's belief that the allies in war must remain allies in peace in order to maintain global order.⁸

This last element was the core of Roosevelt's global blueprint.⁹ American involvement in world affairs and its cooperation with the other great powers were essential. Indeed, Roosevelt's design envisaged a world in which postwar cooperation among the principal powers (the United States, Great Britain, the USSR, and China) would yield a system in which they acted as the **"Four Policemen"** to enforce global order. In other words, whereas in Wilson's League of Nations, all states were to work together to stop warfare and mediate conflict, only the great powers would now have this responsibility. Such a vision bore a striking and unmistakable resemblance to traditional balance-of-power politics, although Roosevelt was unwilling to describe it in such terms.

Strategy: Building Wartime Cooperation To make this global design a reality, two major tasks confronted Roosevelt's wartime diplomatic efforts. One was directed toward building wartime cooperation that would continue after the war. The other was directed toward jarring the United States from its isolationist moorings and positioning the country in such a way that it would retain a role in postwar international politics. To realize the first goal, cooperation with the Soviet Union was deemed essential. Unlike some of his advisors and some State Department officials, Roosevelt believed that such cooperation was possible after

the end of World War II. He believed that the Soviet Union was motivated, in the shorthand of Daniel Yergin, more by the “**Yalta Axioms**” (the name is taken from the 1945 wartime conference in which political bargains were struck between East and West) than by the “**Riga Axioms**” (the name is taken from the Latvian capital city where a U.S. mission was located that “issued constant warning against the [Soviet] international menace” in the 1920s and 1930s).¹⁰

In the Yalta view, the Soviet Union was much like other nations in terms of defining its interests and fostering its goals on the basis of power realities (the Yalta Axioms) rather than being driven primarily by ideological considerations (the Riga Axioms). As Yergin contends, “Roosevelt thought of the Soviet Union less as a revolutionary vanguard than as a conventional imperialist power, with ambitions rather like those of the Czarist regime.”¹¹ Because of this perceived source of Soviet policy, Roosevelt judged that the Grand Alliance among the United States, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union would be able to continue on a “business-like” level as long as each recognized the interests of the other. Moreover, because the Soviet Union would be focused on the reconstruction of its economy and society after the war’s devastation, it would have even further incentives to seek postwar stability and peace.

According to one well-known political analyst, there was another reason for Roosevelt to think that this cooperation could continue: the power of personal diplomacy.¹² Because he had steered American policy toward the recognition of the Soviet Union, shared Stalin’s anxiety over British imperialism, and seemed to acknowledge Soviet interests in the Baltics and Poland, working together would be possible.

To facilitate postwar cooperation with the Soviets, Roosevelt made a concerted effort throughout the war to foster good relations. The United States extended **Lend-Lease assistance** to the Soviet Union (albeit not as rapidly as the Soviet Union wished) and agreed to open up a second front against the Germans to relieve the battlefield pressure the Soviets faced (albeit not as soon as they wanted). Through the several wartime conferences—Teheran, Cairo, Moscow, and Yalta—Roosevelt gained an understanding of the Soviets’ insecurity regarding their exposed western borders, and he recognized the need to take this factor into account in dealing with them. At the same time, he became increasingly convinced that he could work with “Uncle Joe” Stalin and that political bargains and accommodations were possible.

Strategy: A Role in Postwar International Politics Among the wartime conferences, the one that bears most directly on postwar arrangements was Yalta, held in that Crimean resort during February 1945. Not only did this conference reach agreement on a strategy for victory, but it appeared to achieve commitments on the division and operation of postwar Europe. Such understandings were important because they signaled continued American interest and involvement in global affairs—specifically Europe. They also signaled that the competing interests of states were subject to negotiation and accommodation. Spheres of influence and balance-of-power politics were expressly incorporated in these agreements, and the major powers were to be primarily responsible for carrying them out.¹³

Specifically, Roosevelt, Stalin, and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill agreed to zones of German occupation to be held by the Americans, British, French, and Soviets. Second, they conceded some territory to the Soviets at the expense of Poland. (In turn, Poland was to receive some territory from Germany.) Third, they allowed an expansion of the Lublin Committee, which was governing Poland, to include Polish government officials who were in exile in London as a way of dealing with the postwar government in Poland. Fourth, they proclaimed the **Declaration of Liberated Europe**, which specified free elections and constitutional safeguards of individual freedom in the liberated nations. Finally, the conferees produced an agreement on the Soviet Union's entry into the war against Japan and on the veto mechanism within the Security Council of the United Nations.¹⁴

In light of subsequent events, Roosevelt has been highly criticized for the bargains that were struck at Yalta. The Soviets obtained several territorial concessions and, in the space of a few short years, were able to gain control of the Polish government as well as the governments of other Eastern European nations. Roosevelt's rationale was that only by taking into account the interests of the various parties (including the Soviets) was a stable postwar world possible. Moreover, he also appeared to consider Soviet insecurity about its western border in the making of some of these arrangements. Finally, and perhaps most important, Soviet troops already occupied the Eastern European states in question.¹⁵ Any prospects of a more favorable outcome for the Western states appeared to be more hopeful than actually possible.

Despite these criticisms, the Yalta agreements do mark the beginning of an American commitment to global involvement beyond the war. This commitment is further reflected in the agreement regarding the operation of the UN Security Council and in the subsequent conference on the UN charter held in San Francisco during April 1945.¹⁶

The Rise of the Soviet Challenge

The third factor that propelled America's international involvement was **the rise of the Soviet ideological challenge by late 1946 and early 1947**. Although the commitment to a global role for the United States was no less true of President Roosevelt's successor, Harry S Truman, and his principal foreign policy advisors, the emergence of the Soviet challenge steeled and solidified American resolve during this period.

Truman's foreign policy approach was not nearly as well developed as that outlined by Roosevelt's postwar plan, but there was no inclination on his part to reject continued American involvement in the world. Three factors seem to have shaped Truman's determination: (1) his Wilsonian idealism, (2) the wartime situation existing when he assumed office, and (3) the views of his principal foreign policy advisors.

Wilsonian Idealism Prior to assuming the presidency, Truman had displayed a commitment to an international role for the United States. In particular, he



MAP 2.1 Europe Divided between East and West after World War II

agreed with Woodrow Wilson that America should participate in world affairs through a global organization. As a consequence, Truman worked in the Senate to gain support for the emergent United Nations. At the same time, like Wilson, he saw the United States as a moral force in the world and was somewhat suspicious of the postwar design epitomized by the Four Policemen plan.¹⁷ Nonetheless, he supported Roosevelt's plan and worked to put it into practice.

The Wartime Situation Truman's commitment to global involvement was aided by the circumstances at the time he became president. Roosevelt had died just after the conclusion of the Yalta conference, just prior to the United Nations Conference in San Francisco, and just before the Allied victory. As a result, he felt the Yalta agreements had to be implemented, the United Nations needed to become a reality, and the war had to be won. In all of these areas, President Truman followed his predecessor.

The Views of Truman's Advisors Truman's closest advisors were influential in reinforcing his commitment to a leading global role for the United States. These included key advisors such as Admiral William D. Leahy, Ambassador Averell Harriman, Secretary of State Edward R. Stettinius, and Secretary of War Henry Stimson.¹⁸ Later, Secretary of State James Byrnes, Undersecretary of State (and later Secretary of State) Dean Acheson, and Navy Secretary James V. Forrestal became Truman's key policy advisors. They, too, promoted an active global involvement, especially with their less favorable view of the Soviet Union, although, according to historian Ernest May, "their prejudices and predispositions can serve as only one small element" in the change of American policy toward the Soviet Union.¹⁹

Nevertheless, the issue soon became less one of whether there should be American global involvement and more one of its extent. Fueled by negative assessments of the Soviet Union by seasoned diplomatic observers, Truman's advisors increasingly focused on the threat posed by international communism generally and by the Soviets specifically.²⁰ In time, the shape and scope of America's role became largely a consequence of the perceived intentions of Soviet ideology.

Truman's Early Position In the first months after assuming office, President Truman followed Roosevelt's strategy for peace and American involvement by trying to maintain great-power unity. As he said, "I want peace and I am willing to work hard for it: . . . to have a reasonably lasting peace, the three great powers must be able to trust each other." Likewise, he remained faithful to the requirements of the Yalta agreements and tried to cajole Stalin into doing the same by demanding of Soviet Foreign Minister Molotov: "carry out your agreements."²¹

A Changing Environment By the time of the **Potsdam Conference** (July 1945), President Truman was increasingly being urged to get tough with the Soviets while still seeking postwar cooperation. Although the accommodation that

came out of Potsdam over German reparations and German boundaries, as well as other agreements, was deemed tolerable, American officials ultimately came away uneasy over the future prospects of Soviet–American relations.²² Subsequent meetings in London (September 1945) on peace treaties for Finland, Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria, and in Moscow (December 1945), on adherence to the Yalta agreements, reinforced this uneasiness and highlighted the growing suspicion between the United States and the Soviet Union.²³

The end of 1945 and the early months of 1946 seemed to mark a watershed in Soviet–American relations.²⁴ By this time, the American public, Congress, and the president's chief advisors were lobbying for tougher action against Soviet noncompliance with the Yalta agreements and with Soviet efforts to undermine the governments in Eastern Europe. Coupled with these domestic pressures were ominous statements by Stalin and Churchill about American and Soviet intentions toward the world.

Stalin Attacks Capitalism In a speech on February 9, 1946, Soviet leader Joseph Stalin alarmed American policy makers by attacking capitalism, suggesting the inevitability of war among capitalist states, and calling for significant economic strides to meet the capitalist challenge. About the dangers from capitalist states he stated: “Marxists have repeatedly declared that the capitalist world economic system conceals in itself the elements of general crisis and military clashes . . . ;” And he asserted that “the party intends to organize a new powerful advance in the national economy. . . . Only under these circumstances is it possible to consider that our country will be guaranteed against any eventuality.”²⁵

Although the meaning and intent of Stalin's remarks inevitably fostered some debate (one analysis suggests that Stalin did not want a “new war” and said so through 1947), and that his comments “constituted about one-tenth of the address,”²⁶ their ultimate effect on American policy makers was profound. Indeed, in the assessment of two prominent diplomatic historians of this period, Stalin's meaning was clear: “war was inevitable as long as capitalism existed,” and “future wars were inevitable until the world economic system was reformed, that is, until communism supplanted capitalism. . . .”²⁷

Churchill's Response On March 5, 1946, Winston Churchill reciprocated by articulating the West's fear of the East in his famous “**Iron Curtain speech**” at Westminster College in Fulton, Missouri. He called for “a fraternal association of the English-speaking peoples . . . a special relationship between the British Commonwealth and Empire and the United States” to provide global order because “from Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic, an iron curtain has descended across the Continent. Behind that line lie all the capitals of the ancient states of Central and Eastern Europe.” Moreover, these states and many ancient cities “lie in what I must call the Soviet sphere,” Churchill continued, “and all are subject in one form or another, not only to Soviet influence but to a very high and, in many cases, increasing measure of control from Moscow.”²⁸

This speech was a frontal attack on the Soviet Union, and, like Stalin's, suggested the impossibility of continued Soviet–American cooperation in the

postwar world because of differing worldviews. Importantly, President Truman seemed to be giving some legitimacy to such a view by accompanying Churchill to Missouri.²⁹

Kennan's Perception from Moscow At about the same time that these two speeches were delivered, **George Kennan**, an American diplomat serving in Moscow, sent his famous "**long telegram**" to Washington. (The actual date of the message is February 22, 1946.) In it, he outlined his view of the basic premises of the Soviet world outlook, the "Kremlin's neurotic view of world affairs," the "instinctive Russian sense of insecurity," and the "official" and "subterranean" actions against free societies. Soviet policies, Kennan argued, would work vigorously to advance Soviet interests worldwide and to undermine Western powers. "In general," Kennan noted near the end of his message, "all Soviet efforts on [an] unofficial international plane will be negative and destructive in character, designed to tear down sources of strength beyond reach of Soviet control."

Kennan was even more succinct in the concluding section of his message:

[W]e have here a political force committed fanatically to the belief that with US there can be no permanent *modus vivendi*, that it is desirable and necessary that the internal harmony of our society be disrupted, our traditional way of life be destroyed, the international authority of our state be broken, if Soviet power is to be secure. Finally, it is seemingly inaccessible to considerations of reality in its basic reactions. For it, the vast fund of objective facts about human society is not, as with us, the measure against which outlook is constantly tested and reformed, but a grab bag from which individual items are selected arbitrarily and tendentiously to bolster an outlook already preconceived.³⁰

Kennan's view of the Soviet Union has come to be known as the **Riga Axioms** (in contrast to the Yalta Axioms, which President Roosevelt had adopted), which held that ideology, not the realities of power politics, was the important determinant of Soviet conduct. These statements by Stalin and Churchill and the circulation of Kennan's "long telegram" within the Washington bureaucracy increased the clamor for a changed perception toward the Soviet Union, leading to a "get tough" policy on the part of the United States. They also permanently changed the U.S. role in global affairs.

Another telegram in September 1947, sent by the Soviet ambassador to the United States, **Nokolai Novikov**, to the Kremlin, completed this circle of mutual suspicion. In that telegram, Novikov asserted that "the foreign policy of the United States, which reflects the imperialist tendencies of American monopolistic capital, is characterized by a striving for world supremacy. . . . All the forces of American diplomacy—the army, the air force, the navy, industry, and science—are enlisted in the service of this foreign policy." Furthermore, he outlined the various actions carried out by the United States to comport with this perceived policy, including its efforts "directed at limiting or dislodging the influence of the Soviet Union from neighboring countries" and its efforts at preparing "for a future war" against the Soviets.³¹ As diplomatic historian John Lewis Gaddis has

noted, the telegram “reflected Stalin’s thinking” and was “ghost-authored” by Soviet Foreign Minister V.M. Molotov.³² In this sense, it reflected the official view of the Kremlin at the time.

In essence, then, Kennan’s and Novikov’s telegrams solidified “a particular worldview and analytical framework that had been established” in both countries with the result that “confrontation escalated as each side pursued a diplomacy that aimed to counter the perceived expansionism of the other.”³³

AMERICA’S GLOBALISM: THE TRUMAN DOCTRINE AND BEYOND

The immediate American response to calls to “**get tough**” was reflected in its policy over Soviet troops remaining in Iran in March 1946. Under the **Tripartite Treaty of Alliance** signed by Iran, the Soviet Union, and Great Britain in January 1942, Allied forces were to be withdrawn from Iranian territory within six months after hostilities ended. However, by March 2, 1946—six months after the surrender of Japan—all British and American forces had indeed withdrawn, but Soviet forces remained. The Soviets were sending in additional troops, were continuing to meddle in Iranian politics, and apparently had designs on Turkey and Iraq from their Iranian base.³⁴

The American leadership decided to stand firm on the withdrawal of Soviet forces. Secretary of State James Byrnes and British Foreign Minister Ernest Bevin delivered speeches that made the West’s position clear. In late February 1946 Secretary Byrnes claimed:

We have joined our allies in the United Nations to put an end to war. We have covenanted not to use force except in the defense of law as embodied in the purposes and principles of the [UN] Charter. We intend to live up to that covenant. . . .

But as a great power and as a permanent member of the Security Council *we have a responsibility to use our influence to see that other powers live up to their covenant.* . . .

We will not and we cannot stand aloof if force or threat of force is used contrary to the purposes and principles of the Charter. We have no right to hold our troops in the territories of other sovereign states without their approval and consent freely given.³⁵

Later, on March 16, Byrnes reiterated American resolve, that repeated some of his earlier themes. Faced with British and American resolve as expressed in such speeches and with an imminent UN Security Council session on the Iranian issue, the Soviet Union sought a negotiated solution. In early April 1946, an agreement was reached that called for the withdrawal of all Soviet forces from Iran by the middle of May 1946.³⁶ The Soviets’ actions demonstrate that when America adopted a tougher policy line toward the Soviet Union, it was able to achieve results.

Despite the initial success of this firmer course in early 1946, the real change in America's Soviet policy (and ultimately its policy toward the rest of the world) was not fully manifested until a year later. The occasion was the question of aid to two strategically important countries, **Greece and Turkey**.

The Greek government was under pressure from a Communist-supported national liberation movement; Turkey was under political pressure from the Soviet Union and its allies over control of the Dardanelles (the straits that provide access to the Mediterranean from the Soviets' Black Sea ports) and over territorial concessions to the Soviets in Turkish-Soviet border areas.³⁷ Because the British had indicated to the Americans in February 1947 that they could no longer aid these countries, the burden apparently now fell to the United States to see that these states remained stable. Accordingly, President Truman decided to seek \$400 million in aid for them.

The granting of aid in itself was not a sharp break from the past, as the United States had provided assistance to Greece previously in 1946.³⁸ What was dramatic was the aid request's *form*, *rationale*, and *purpose*. The form was a formal speech delivered by Truman to a joint session of Congress on March 12, 1947. The rationale was even more dramatic: the need to stop the expansion of global communism. Most startling was the purpose: to commit the United States to a global strategy against this communist threat.

In his speech, in which he announced what has come to be known as the **Truman Doctrine**, the president first set out the conditions in Greece and Turkey that necessitated this assistance. Then he more fully outlined the justification for his policy and identified the global struggle that the United States faced. America must "*help free peoples to maintain their free institutions and their national identity against aggressive movements that seek to impose on them totalitarian regimes.*" Moreover, such threats to freedom affected U.S. security: "*totalitarian regimes imposed on free peoples, by direct or indirect aggression, undermine the foundations of international peace and hence the security of the United States.*" At this juncture in history, he continued, the nations of the world faced a decision between two ways of life: one free, the other unfree; one based "on the will of the majority," the other on "the will of a minority," one based on "free institutions," the other on "terror and oppression." The task for the United States, therefore, was a clear one: "*we must assist free peoples to work out their own destinies in their own way.*" Truman had clearly drawn the challenge to the Soviet Union. The Cold War had begun.³⁹

The specific policy that the United States was to adopt in this struggle with the Soviet Union was one of **containment**. This term was first used in an anonymously authored article in *Foreign Affairs* magazine in July 1947. (Its author was quickly identified as George Kennan, by then the head of the policy planning staff at the Department of State, who based it on his original "long telegram" sent to the State Department a year earlier.) According to "Mr. X," the appropriate policy to adopt against the Soviet challenge was "a long-term patient but firm and vigilant containment of Russian expansive tendencies." Specifically, he called for the application of "counter-force at a series of constantly shifting geographical and political points," against Soviet actions. By following such a policy,

the United States might, over time, force “a far greater degree of moderation and circumspection . . . and in this way . . . promote . . . tendencies which must eventually find their outlet in either the breakup or the gradual mellowing of Soviet power.”⁴⁰

Kennan identified a number of conditions within the Soviet system that would aid containment in achieving its goal. The population “in Russia today,” he noted, “is physically and spiritually tired,” the impact of the Soviet system on the young remained unclear, and the performance of the Soviet economy “has been precariously spotty and uneven.”⁴¹ Finally, the issue of succession was decidedly incomplete:

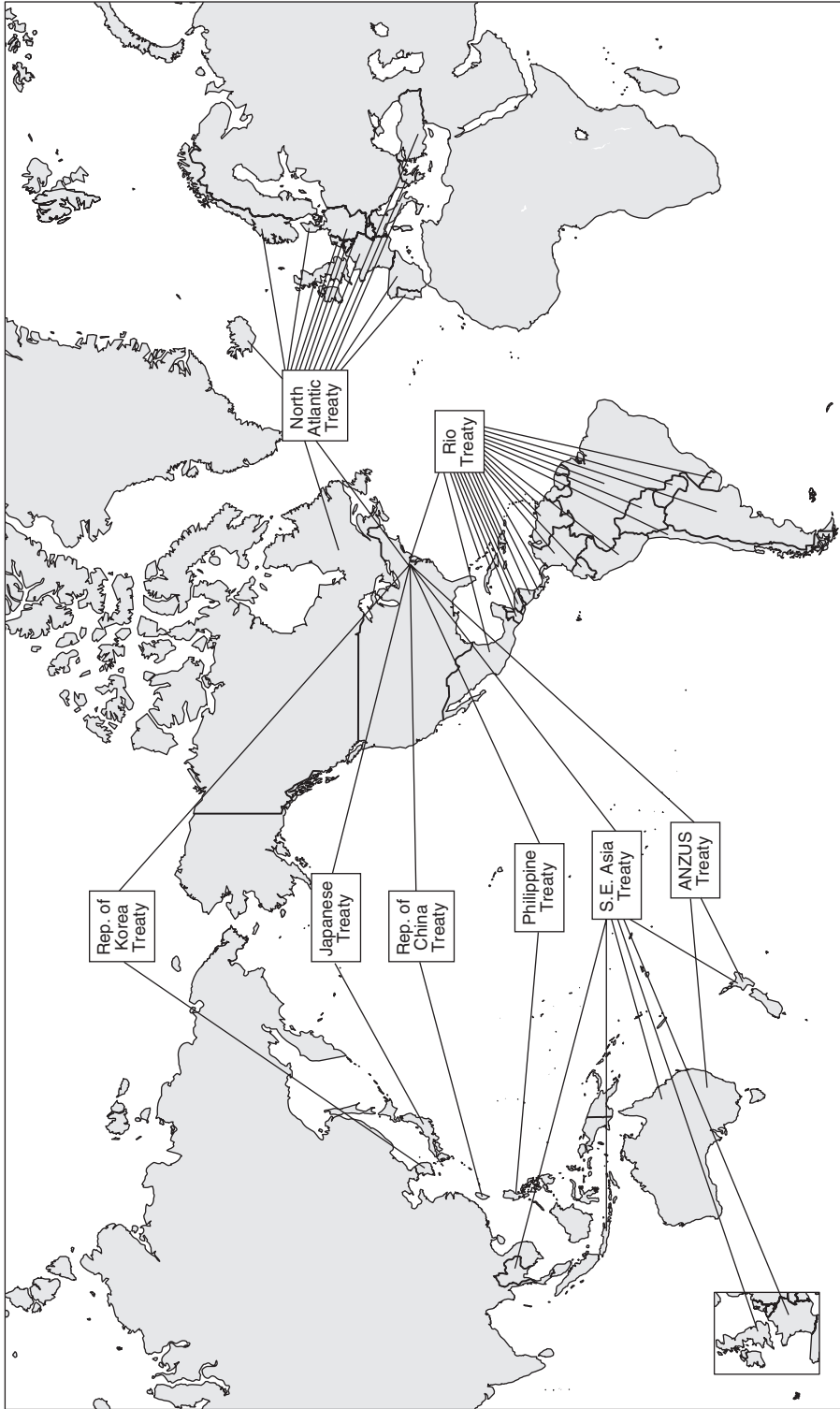
The future of Soviet power may not be by any means as secure as Russian capacity for self-delusion would make it appear to the men in the Kremlin. That they can keep power themselves, they have demonstrated. That they can quietly and easily turn it over to others remains to be proved.⁴²

Although Kennan was confident that a steady course would be successful, he was imprecise regarding what the counterforce or containment toward the Soviet Union should entail. As a result, the response by American policy makers, which Kennan later criticized,⁴³ was to embark on a series of sweeping military, economic, and political initiatives from 1947 through the mid-1950s to control international communism.

ELEMENTS OF CONTAINMENT: REGIONAL SECURITY PACTS

The first, and probably principal, containment initiative was the establishment of several regional political-military alliances. In September 1947, the *Rio Pact* (formally known as the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance) was signed by the United States and twenty-one Latin American republics. In April 1949, the *North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)* was set up by the United States, Canada, and ten Western European nations (rising to thirteen in the 1950s and fourteen by 1982). Two other important pacts were established: the *ANZUS Treaty* in September 1951,⁴⁴ and the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty in September 1954. The former involved the United States, Australia, and New Zealand. The latter included the United States, Great Britain, France, Australia, New Zealand, Pakistan, the Philippines, and Thailand, forming what became known as the *Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO)*. (a protocol was added to provide security protection for South Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos. This would become most important in light of America's subsequent involvement in the Vietnam War.⁴⁵) Map 2.2 shows these organizations and the areas they covered; Table 2.1 summarizes their principal goals and memberships.

One other collective security pact was created, the *Central Treaty Organization (CENTO)* during this period, although the United States was not a direct



MAP 2.2 U.S. Collective Defense Arrangements

Table 2.1 Membership and Goals for U.S. Collective Defense Arrangements

Multilateral Pacts

The Rio Treaty, or the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance

Goals: Signed on September 2, 1947, stipulating that an armed attack against any American state “shall be considered as an attack against all the American States and . . . each one . . . undertakes to assist in meeting the attack. . . .”

Membership: United States, Mexico, Cuba, Haiti, Dominican Republic, Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panama, Colombia, Venezuela, Ecuador, Peru, Brazil, Bolivia, Paraguay, Chile, Argentina, Uruguay, and Trinidad and Tobago

North Atlantic Treaty

Goals: Signed April 4, 1949, stipulating that “the Parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all; and . . . each of them . . . will assist the . . . attacked by taking forthwith, individually and in concert with the other Parties, such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force. . . .”

Membership: United States, Canada, Iceland, Norway, Great Britain, the Netherlands, Denmark, Belgium, Luxembourg, Portugal, France, Italy, Greece (joined in 1952), Turkey (1952), Federal Republic of Germany (1955), and Spain (1982)

ANZUS Treaty

Goals: Signed September 1, 1951, stipulating that each party “recognizes that an armed attack in the Pacific Area on any of the Parties would be dangerous to its own peace and safety and declares that it would act to meet the common danger in accordance with its constitutional processes.”

Membership: United States, New Zealand, and Australia

Southeast Asia Treaty

Goals: Signed September 8, 1954, stipulating that each party “recognizes that aggression by means of armed attack in the treaty area against any of the Parties . . . would endanger its own peace and safety” and each will “in that event act to meet the common danger in accordance with its constitutional processes.”

Membership: United States, Great Britain, France, New Zealand, Australia, Philippines, and Thailand

Bilateral Pacts

Philippine Treaty

Goals: Signed August 30, 1951, stipulating that each party recognizes “that an armed attack in the Pacific Area on either of the Parties would be dangerous to its own peace and safety” and each party agrees that it will act “to meet the common danger in accordance with its constitutional processes.”

Membership: United States and the Philippines

Japanese Treaty

Goals: Signed January 19, 1960 (replacing the original security treaty of September 8, 1951), stipulating that each party “recognizes that an armed attack against either Party in the territories under the administration of Japan would be dangerous to its own peace and safety and declares that it would act to meet the common danger in accordance with its constitutional provisions and processes.”

Membership: United States and Japan

Republic of Korea Treaty

Goals: Signed October 1, 1953, stipulating that each party “recognizes that an armed attack in the Pacific area on either of the Parties . . . would be dangerous to its own peace and safety” and that each party “would act to meet the common danger in accordance with its constitutional processes.”

Membership: United States and the Republic of Korea

Republic of China Treaty

Goals: Signed December 2, 1954, stipulating that each party “recognizes that an armed attack in the West Pacific Area directed against the territories of either of the Parties would be dangerous to its own peace and safety . . .” and that each “would act to meet the common danger in accordance with its constitutional processes.” The territory of the Republic of China is defined as “Taiwan (Formosa) and the Pescadores.”

Membership: United States and the Republic of China

member. CENTO evolved from a bilateral agreement of mutual cooperation between Iraq and Turkey (the so-called Baghdad Pact of February 1955) and was formally constituted in 1959 with the inclusion of the United Kingdom, Pakistan, and Iran. Through an executive agreement with Turkey, the United States pledged to support the security of its members and to provide various kinds of assistance. In addition, the United States actively participated in CENTO meetings and assisted with its joint undertakings. Because of U.S. involvement and indirect support, CENTO was actually another link in U.S. global security arrangements initiated in the immediate postwar years.

All of these defense agreements provided for assistance when organization members were confronted by armed attacks, threats of aggression, or even internal subversion (in the case of SEATO). For the ANZUS, SEATO, Rio, and CENTO pacts, however, response was not automatic. Instead, each of the signatories agreed, in the main, "to meet the common danger in accordance with its constitutional processes."⁴⁶ NATO is usually identified as an exception for at least two reasons: (1) The commitment by the parties to respond to an attack appears to be more automatic than in other pacts. (2) Its organizational structure developed much more fully than did that of the others.

First, Article 5 of the NATO agreement seemed to call for an automatic armed response to an attack by the signatories:

The Parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all, and consequently they agree that, if such an armed attack occurs, each of them . . . will assist the Party or Parties so attacked by taking forthwith, individually and in concert with the other Parties, such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force, to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area.⁴⁷

However, constitutional scholar Michael Glennon has cautioned against too facile an interpretation of this article. As he notes, a party to the pact could take actions it "deems necessary," but troops were not necessarily required automatically. Indeed, at the time, Secretary of State Dean Acheson, in commenting on this treaty provision, downplayed the automaticity of troop commitments, acknowledging that only Congress had that authority. Still, both Acheson and Truman's congressional allies vigorously opposed a reservation that would have fully spelled out the limits of the NATO commitment. The Truman administration apparently wanted to maintain some ambiguity, both to accommodate critics at home and to reassure allies abroad.⁴⁸ Thus, the NATO commitment appears a bit different from that of other pacts during this time.

Second, the members of NATO established an integrated military command structure and called for the commitment of forces (although they would remain under ultimate national command) by members.

In both of these ways, NATO proved the most important of the regional security pacts because it involved the area of greatest concern for American interests and because Europe was regarded as the primary area of potential Soviet aggression.

In addition to the regional military organizations, a series of bilateral defense pacts were established in Asia to combat Soviet and Chinese aggression. Completed with the Philippines (1951), Japan (1951), the Republic of Korea (1953), and the Republic of China, or Taiwan (1954), they resulted from two major political events in Asia in the late 1940s and early 1950s: the Communist triumph in China under Mao Tse-tung in 1949 and the outbreak of war in Korea in 1950. (This latter event will be discussed shortly.)⁴⁹

With these bilateral treaties in the early 1950s, the mosaic of global security was largely completed. Moreover, Map 2.2 indicates that the United States was quite successful in forming alliances in most areas that were not directly under Soviet control.

Two prominent regions, Africa and the Middle East, were still not directly covered by any security arrangements. Here too, however, some elements of containment were evident. In Africa, for instance, the colonial powers still held sway, and thus the continent was largely under the Western European containment shield.⁵⁰ Security efforts in the Middle East were more complex. Although the regimes were mainly traditional monarchies, stirrings of nationalism and pan-Arabism within Egypt under Gamal Abdel Nasser and their spread throughout the Arab world made treaty commitments difficult. Added to these factors were America's close ties to Israel over the festering Arab-Israeli conflict. Still, the United States did initiate one important security proposal in this volatile area: the so-called **Eisenhower Doctrine**.

The Eisenhower Doctrine arose from a speech given by President Dwight D. Eisenhower to a joint session of Congress on perceived trouble in the Middle East and the need to combat it. "If power-hungry Communists should either falsely or correctly estimate that the Middle East is inadequately defended, they might be tempted to use open measures of armed attack," Eisenhower declared. He asked Congress for authority to extend economic and military assistance as needed and to use armed force "to assist any such nation or group of such nations requesting assistance against armed aggression from any country controlled by international communism,"⁵¹ and Congress complied. U.S. security commitments were now truly global in scope.

ELEMENTS OF CONTAINMENT: ECONOMIC AND MILITARY ASSISTANCE

The second set of initiatives to implement the containment strategy focused on economic and military assistance to friendly nations. From the late 1940s through the mid- and late 1950s, aid reaching over \$10 billion in 1953 was provided to an ever-expanding number of nations throughout the world. Although the initial goal of this assistance was to foster the economic well-being of the recipients, the ultimate rationale, especially after 1950, was *strategic* and *political*: to ensure the stability of countries threatened by international communism and to build support for anticommunism on a global scale. Three important programs reflect

the kinds of U.S. assistance during this period as well as its change in orientation over time:

- The Marshall Plan
- The Point Four program
- The mutual security concept⁵²

The Marshall Plan

Proposed in a speech by **Secretary of State George Marshall** at Harvard University's June 1947 commencement exercises, the Marshall Plan remains the United States' best-known assistance effort. In his address, Marshall called for Europeans to draw up a plan for economic recovery and pledged American economic support for it. As a consequence of this speech and subsequent European–American consultations, President Truman asked Congress for \$17 billion over a four-year period, from 1948 to 1952, to revitalize Western Europe.

The enormity of this aid commitment becomes apparent when compared to the approximately \$1 billion in assistance offered to Eastern Europe after the collapse of the Iron Curtain in 1989 and 1990. Its size is also reflected in the fact that the Marshall Plan constituted about 1.2 percent of the GNP of the United States at the time. In contrast, the amount of U.S. development assistance in recent years has constituted well under 0.5 percent of U.S. GNP; in 2007, it constituted only 0.16 percent of the Gross National Income (a measure closely equivalent to GNP).⁵³

The rationale for the Marshall Plan was the rebuilding of the economic system of Western Europe. As a key U.S. trading partner, a healthy Europe was important to America's economic health. Beyond economic concerns, though, were political concerns. If Europe did not recover, the region might well be subject to political instability and perhaps Communist penetration and subversion. According to one analysis of Marshall Plan decision making, this "threat" dimension became particularly important in the late stages of deliberations (February through April 1948, just prior to the plan's enactment).⁵⁴ In this sense, then, by the time of its formal passage by Congress, the **European Recovery Program**, as the Marshall Plan was formally known, had clear elements of the containment strategy.

Point Four

The Marshall Plan proved remarkably successful in fostering European recovery, but President Truman envisioned a broader plan of assistance for the rest of the world. He announced his Point Four program in his inaugural address of January 20, 1949. (The name was derived from the fact that this was the fourth major point in his suggested course of action for American policy.) The aim of this program was to develop the essentials of the Marshall Plan, which was then under way in Western Europe, on a global scale. Unlike the Marshall Plan, though, Point Four was less a cooperative venture and more a unilateral effort on the part of the United States, although America's allies might also become involved. In essence, it

would provide industrial, technological, and economic assistance to underdeveloped nations⁵⁵ and in this sense represented an imaginative and substantial commitment to global economic development.

The Mutual Security Concept

Although Point Four had some of the ambitious economic—and undoubtedly political—motivations that the Marshall Plan had, it did not receive sufficient funding authorization from the Congress⁵⁶ and instead was quickly replaced by a new, more explicitly political approach known as mutual security. The **mutual security approach** emphasized aid to nations combating communism and strengthening U.S. security and the security of the “Free World.” In addition to the change in rationale, was a change in the kind of assistance: from primarily economic and humanitarian to military by the early and mid-1950s. Although economic aid was not halted during this period, now it was more likely given to bolster the overall security capability of friendly countries.

These changes in aid policy can be explained by the deepening global crisis that the United States perceived in the world. Tensions between the Soviet Union and the United States were rising over Soviet actions in Eastern Europe and its potential actions toward Western Europe. The Korean War had broken out, apparently with Soviet compliance, and the Chinese Communists later entered the conflict, again evoking concern over Communist intentions. Domestically, too, there was an increased sense of Communist threat led by the verbal assaults of Senator Joseph McCarthy of Wisconsin against various individuals and groups for being “soft on communism.” All in all, America’s national security was perceived to be under attack, and this required some response.

The first manifestation of the new aid strategy was the **Mutual Defense Assistance Act of 1949**,⁵⁷—signed after the completion of the NATO pact and after the Soviets had tested an atomic bomb—which provided for military aid to Western Europe, Greece, Turkey, Iran, South Korea, the Philippines, and the “China area.” The strategic locations of these countries are obvious: Most bordered the Soviet Union or mainland China. Although the amount of aid called for was relatively small, its significance lay in the fact that it was the initial effort in U.S. military aid.

The **Mutual Security Act of 1951** marked the real beginning of growth in military assistance funding. Equally important, its language dramatically illustrated the linkage between the new aid policy and American security. The goals of the act were

to maintain the security and to promote the foreign policy of the United States by authorizing military, economic, and technical assistance to friendly countries to strengthen the mutual security and individual and collective defenses of the free world, [and] to develop their resources in the interest of their security and independence and the national interest of the United States.⁵⁸

With successive mutual security acts like this one, American global assistance, and particularly military assistance, increased sharply. Furthermore, the number of recipient countries began to grow. As Figure 2.1 shows, military aid came to

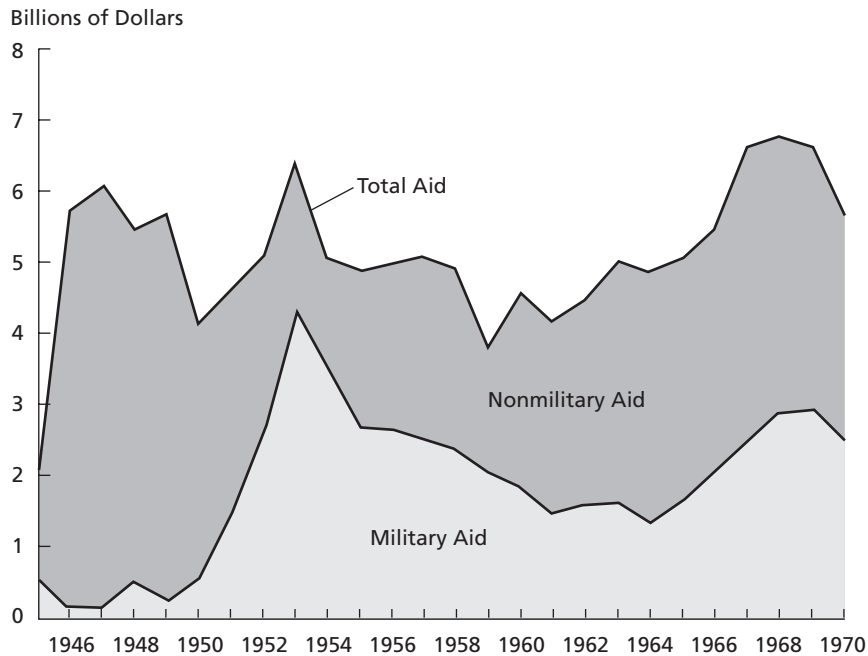


FIGURE 2.1 Patterns in Foreign Aid, 1945–1970 (Net Grants and Credits)

Source: *The Statistical History of the United States from Colonial Times to the Present* (New York: Basic Books, 1976), pp. 274, 872.

dominate the U.S. assistance effort. Even with the addition of food aid under Public Law 480 in 1954 and some technical and developmental assistance to particular countries (e.g., Yugoslavia and Poland),⁵⁹ military assistance was often greater than nonmilitary assistance until about 1960. By that time, a new approach, one motivated more explicitly by development considerations, was being contemplated and was finally implemented by the Kennedy administration in 1961 with the establishment of the Agency for International Development (AID). Still, the political rationale for economic aid—as a way to save America’s friends from Soviet (and Chinese) communism—continued.

ELEMENTS OF CONTAINMENT: THE DOMESTIC COLD WAR

The third element in the strategy of containment was primarily domestic, with the aim of making the American people aware of the Soviet threat and changing American domestic priorities to combat it. In essence, this aspect of containment might be labeled the *domestication* of the Cold War. One important document, drawn up by the National Security Council in April 1950 and entitled *NSC-68*, summarized the goals of this effort and provides a guide to the subsequent domestic and international changes that occurred. Along with the

Korean War, discussed in the next section, *NSC-68* solidified America's commitment to the containment policy course.

NSC-68: Defense

NSC-68 was the result of a review of American foreign and domestic defense policies by State and Defense Department officials under the leadership of Paul Nitze. (Because the report remained classified until 1975, it gives us a unique picture of the thinking of American officials unrestrained by the fear of public disclosure.) The document itself is a rather lengthy statement that begins by outlining the current international crisis between the Soviet Union and the United States and goes on to contrast the foreign policy goals of Washington and Moscow in much the same vein as that of the Truman Doctrine, albeit in much harsher language. Document 2.1 excerpts portions of *NSC-68* that depict these alternate views of the world.⁶⁰ Note the way that Soviet and American goals are characterized and the conflict that the United States now faced is portrayed.

NSC-68 outlined four policy options for responding to the Soviet challenge: (1) continuing current policies; (2) returning to isolationism; (3) resorting to war against the Soviet Union; and (4) "a rapid build-up of political, economic and military strength in the Free World." After careful analysis along military, economic, political, and social lines, the study recommend a rapid buildup of American and allied strength as "the only course which is consistent with progress toward achieving our fundamental purpose. The frustration of the Kremlin design requires the free world to develop a successfully functioning political and economic system and a vigorous political offensive against the Soviet Union."⁶¹

What distinguishes *NSC-68* from other elements of containment is its emphasis on a domestic response to the Soviet threat. Along with calling for aid to allies and the promotion of anticommunism around the world, it offered substantial commentary on the need to build up America's military capacity and elicit greater support against the Soviet challenge at home.

The U.S. military, *NSC-68* contended, was inferior to the Soviet military in the number of "forces in being and in total manpower." The amount of defense spending was also relatively low, about 6 to 7 percent of U.S. GNP compared to more than 13 percent of Soviet GNP. In response, *NSC-68* called for a rapid buildup of the American military establishment as a countermeasure. Indeed, *NSC-68* went beyond this important general demand by proposing a new policy on military budgeting: In the future, it might be necessary to meet defense and foreign assistance needs by reducing federal expenditures in other areas—and by increasing taxes.⁶² In effect, this policy was to make defense spending the number-one priority in the federal budget. Instead of a residual category of the budget, it was to become the focal point of future allocation decisions.

NSC-68 made at least one other significant statement on military planning. In the body of the report (not specifically in its conclusions), it called for the United States to "produce and stockpile thermonuclear weapons in the event they prove feasible and would add significantly to our net capability."⁶³ Although this reference is relatively oblique in context, it was significant in timing. During this period, the Truman administration was embroiled in a debate over the building of the H-bomb.

Document 2.1 Excerpts from NSC-68, April 14, 1950

**FUNDAMENTAL DESIGN
OF THE UNITED STATES**

The fundamental purpose of the United States is laid down in the Preamble of the Constitution. . . . In essence, [it] is to assure the integrity and vitality of our free society, which is founded on the dignity and worth of the individual.

**FUNDAMENTAL DESIGN
OF THE KREMLIN**

The fundamental design of those who control the Soviet Union and the international communist movement is to retain and solidify their absolute power, first in the Soviet Union and second in the areas now under their control. In the minds of the Soviet leaders, however, achievement of this design requires the dynamic extension of their authority and the ultimate elimination of any effective opposition to their authority. . . . The United States, as the principal center of power in the non-Soviet world and the bulwark of opposition to Soviet expansion, is the principal enemy whose integrity and vitality must be subverted or destroyed by one means or another if the Kremlin is to achieve its fundamental design.

NATURE OF THE CONFLICT

The Kremlin regards the United States as the only major threat to the achievement of its fundamental design. There is a basic conflict between the idea

of freedom under a government of law, and the idea of slavery under the grim oligarchy of the Kremlin. . . . The idea of freedom, moreover, is peculiarly and intolerably subversive of the idea of slavery. But the converse is not true. The implacable purpose of the slave state to eliminate the challenge of freedom has placed the two great powers at opposite poles. It is this fact which gives the present polarization of power the quality of crisis.

The assault on free institutions is world-wide now, and in the context of the present polarization of power a defeat of free institutions anywhere is a defeat everywhere. . . .

In a shrinking world, which now faces the threat of atomic warfare, it is not an adequate objective merely to seek to check the Kremlin design, for the absence of order among nations is becoming less and less tolerable. This fact imposes on us, in our own interests, the responsibility of world leadership. It demands that we make the attempt, and accept the risks inherent in it, to bring about order and justice by means consistent with the principles of freedom and democracy. . . . Coupled with the probable fission bomb capability and possible thermonuclear bomb capability of the Soviet Union, the intensifying struggle requires us to face the fact that we can expect no lasting abatement of the crisis unless and until a change occurs in the nature of the Soviet system.

Source: A Report to the National Security Council, April 14, 1950, pp. 5–9. Declassified on February 27, 1975, by Henry A. Kissinger, assistant to the president for National Security Affairs.

NSC-68: Internal Security

A second important domestic issue discussed in the report concerned America's moral capabilities. These, too, were vulnerable, as the Soviets might well seek to undermine America's social and cultural institutions by infiltration and intimidation:

Those that touch most closely our material and moral strength are obviously the prime targets, labor unions, civic enterprises, schools, churches, and all media for influencing opinion. The effort is not so much to make them serve obvious Soviet ends as to prevent them from serving our ends, and thus to

make them sources of confusion in our economy, our culture and our body politic.⁶⁴

Hence, internal security and civilian defense programs were necessary to “assure the internal security of the United States against dangers of sabotage, subversion, and espionage.” And the government must “keep the U.S. public fully informed and cognizant of the threats to our national security so that it will be prepared to support the measures which we must accordingly adopt.”⁶⁵ In essence, efforts must be made to protect the American people against subversion and to gain their support for Cold War policies.

To a considerable degree, the *NSC-68* recommendations became American policy in the early 1950s, sparked by American involvement in the **Korean War**. Defense expenditures escalated to more than 10 percent of the GNP and generally stayed above 8 percent throughout the 1960s. Similarly, defense spending as a percentage of the federal budget rose sharply after *NSC-68* to more than 50 percent and remained over 40 percent for all the years of the Johnson administration. A parallel growth occurred in the size of the U.S. armed forces, with the number of military personnel under arms reaching over 22 per 1,000 population in the early fifties and remaining at about 14 per 1,000 throughout the height of the Vietnam War. (Figure 2.2 provides a summary of these trends during the 1946–1968 period.⁶⁶) Additionally, the H-bomb program was given the go-ahead, and thus nuclear weapons became a part of America’s defense strategy.

Efforts to ensure internal security were undertaken as well. As we have already noted, Senator Joseph McCarthy initiated his campaign against “communists” within the government; the public, too, raised questions about Communist subversion. Various investigations by the **House Un-American Activities Committee** of the 1950s and 1960s reflect this growing concern with Soviet penetration, as do FBI and CIA surveillance activities in this area (which the Church Committee investigations of intelligence activities were to reveal in the mid-1970s). Efforts to impose loyalty oaths, too, reflect this trend toward national security consciousness.

In short, political attacks, from the schoolroom to the boardroom, produced a widespread fear of veering too far from the mainstream on foreign policy issues. To a remarkable degree, a foreign policy consensus was the result of the political and psychological effects of the Cold War, and foreign policy debate suffered. When it did occur, it was more often on foreign policy tactics than on fundamental strategy.⁶⁷

KOREA: THE FIRST MAJOR TEST OF CONTAINMENT

Although the events in Greece and Turkey stimulated the emergence of containment in 1947, the first major test of this policy, and the event that brought the Cold War fully into existence, occurred in Korea. On June 25, 1950, North Korea

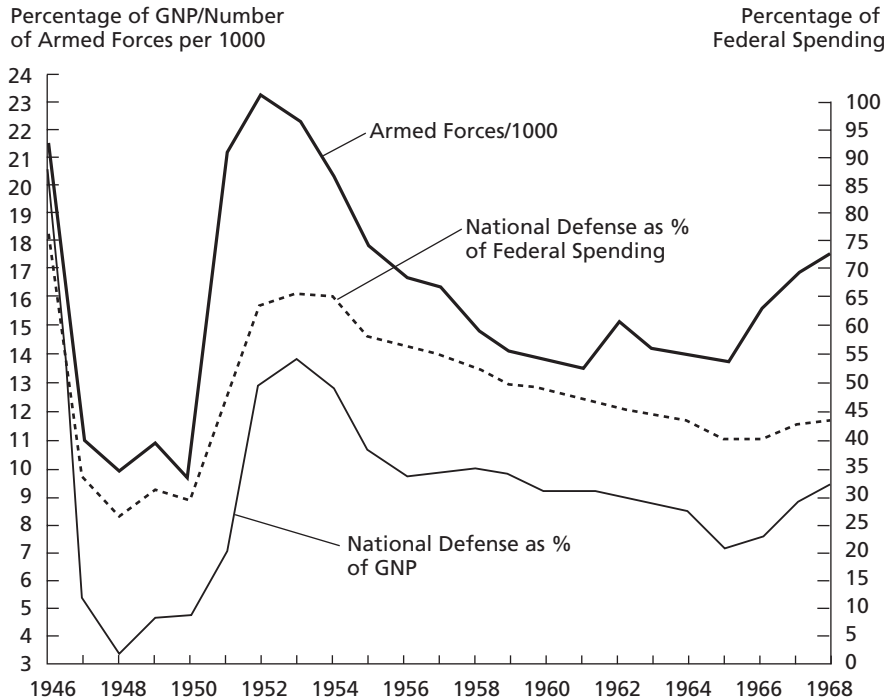


FIGURE 2.2 National Defense Expenditures and U.S. Armed Forces per 1,000 Population, 1946–1968

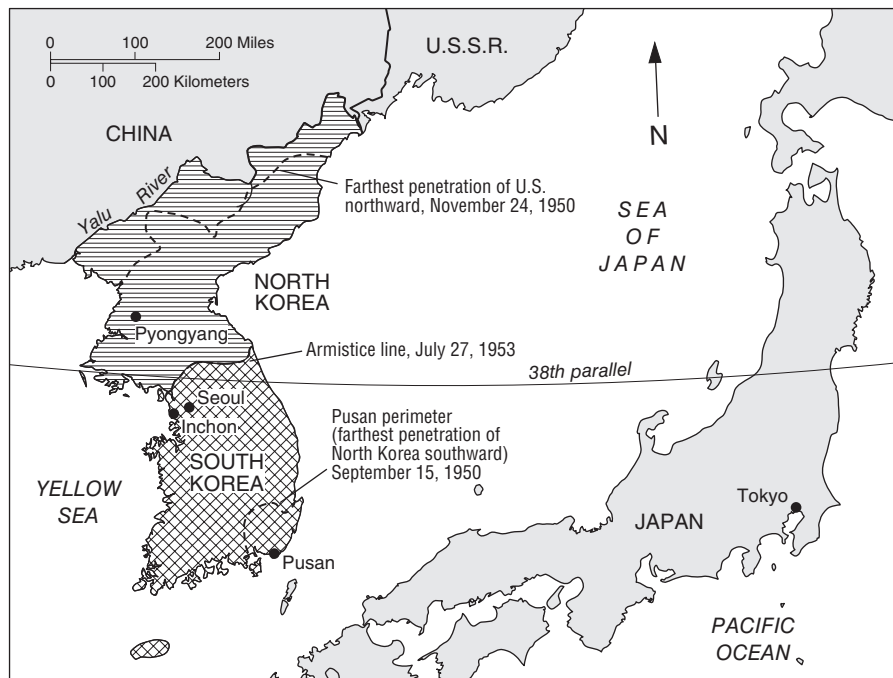
Sources: The data for national defense as a percentage of federal spending and GNP are taken from Alice C. Moroni, *The Fiscal Year 1984 Defense Budget Request: Data Summary* (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 1983), p. 13. Total national defense data, rather than only Department of Defense data, are used here. The two totals are usually very close (p. 14). The armed forces percentages were calculated from total population (Part 1, p. 8) and armed forces (Part 2, p. 1141) data in U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970*, Bicentennial Edition, Parts 1 and 2 (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1975).

attacked South Korea, an action that quickly engaged the Soviet Union, China, and the United States in a confrontation on the Korean peninsula. For the United States in particular it provided the *raison d'être* for fully implementing the various elements of the containment strategy just outlined.

American Involvement in Korea

A brief description of the Korean conflict, its origins, and the extent of U.S. involvement will illustrate the significance of this war for American postwar policy.

Korea had been annexed by the Japanese in 1910 and was finally freed by American and Soviet forces at the end of World War II. By agreement between the Soviet Union and the United States, Korea was then temporarily divided



MAP 2.3 The Korean War, 1950–1953

along the 38th parallel, with Soviet forces occupying the North and U.S. forces occupying the South (see Map 2.3). Despite several maneuvers by both sides, this division assumed a more permanent cast when a UN-supervised election in the South resulted in the establishment of the **Republic of Korea** on August 15, 1948, and when the adoption of a constitution in the North resulted in the creation of the **Democratic People's Republic of Korea** on September 9, 1948.⁶⁸ Both regimes claimed to be the government of Korea, and neither would recognize or accept the legitimacy of the other. Although Soviet and American occupying forces left in 1948 and 1949, respectively, the struggle between North and South (with the support of their powerful allies) was not finished.

The struggle soon erupted into sustained violence in mid-1950, when North Korea attacked South Korea and the two regimes' powerful allies were brought back into the conflict. Indeed, the United States viewed this attack on the South as Soviet-inspired and Soviet-directed,⁶⁹ and a great deal of scholarship has been directed at whether this view was accurate.⁷⁰ A former undersecretary of state at the time, U. Alexis Johnson, has made the essential point in this debate: "Whatever prompted Kim [Kim Il-Sung, the North Korean leader] to order the attack, this is certain: At the time no responsible official in the United States or among our allies seriously questioned that the aggression was Soviet-inspired and aimed

principally at testing our resolve.”⁷¹ With this overriding perception, the United States had little recourse but to respond, thus making the containment doctrine a reality.

Within days of the North Korean attack on South Korea, President Truman ordered American air and naval support for the beleaguered South Korean troops and dispatched the Seventh Fleet to patrol the Formosa Strait to prevent Communist Chinese actions against the nationalist government on Taiwan. In addition, he sought and quickly obtained United Nations Security Council condemnation of the attack and support of a collective security force to be sent to aid the South Korean forces under U.S. direction. (The UN action was made possible by the Soviet Union’s boycott of Security Council sessions because the China seat had not been given to the Communist government led by Mao Tse-tung, which meant that the Soviet Union was unable to exercise its veto.) Although some fourteen other nations ultimately sent forces to Korea, the bulk of the war effort was America’s.⁷² Indeed, the commander of all UN and U.S. forces was General Douglas MacArthur.

The American-led effort in Korea fared badly at first. After the allied troops were driven to a small enclave around Pusan in Southeast Korea, the North Koreans were poised to overrun the entire peninsula. In September 15, 1950, however, General MacArthur executed his Inchon landing near Seoul behind North Korean lines, and, within a matter of weeks, proceeded across the 38th parallel. Although this invasion was brilliant as a strategic move, it alarmed the Chinese when MacArthur’s forces moved ever northward, coming within miles of the Chinese border.⁷³

China had warned the West indirectly, through Indian channels in September 1950, that it would not “sit back with folded hands and let the Americans come to the border.”⁷⁴ However, the warning was not taken seriously by U.S. policy makers. As early as mid-October 1950, **Chinese People’s Volunteers** began crossing the border to aid North Korea, and by late November 1950, more than 300,000 were fighting alongside the North Koreans against UN and U.S. forces. This massive Chinese intervention drove allied forces back across the **38th parallel**, the “temporary” dividing line between North and South Korea. Stalemate ensued.

General MacArthur proposed that U.S. forces carry the war into China as a way to resolve the conflict. However, because President Truman had ordered him not to make public statements without administration approval and because administration policy was to limit the conflict, MacArthur was relieved of command for insubordination. This action caused an outpouring of support for him and vilification of President Truman.⁷⁵

By and large, the American people continued to support the proposition that, once a war was undertaken, it should be fought to victory and not be limited by political constraints. The Truman administration felt otherwise. As General Omar Bradley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, put it, “So long as we regarded the Soviet Union as the main antagonist and Western Europe as the main prize” a massive invasion of China “would involve us in the wrong war at the wrong place at the wrong time and with the wrong enemy.” In other words, involvement in a

land war in Asia would lead “to a larger deadlock at greater expense” and would do little to contain Soviet designs on Western Europe.⁷⁶

By July 1951, truce talks were arranged and fighting ceased, for the most part, by the end of the year. An armistice did not come about for another year and a half, however, because of the prolonged controversy that developed over the repatriation of prisoners of war and because the American election had made Korea an important issue. An uneasy peace eventually resulted with the establishment of a demilitarized zone between North and South.

The Korean War, as the first test of containment, however, brought numerous lessons for American policy makers for the future course of the Cold War.⁷⁷

Korea and Implications for the Cold War

Political scientist Robert Jervis argues that American involvement in Korea “shaped the course of the Cold War by both resolving the incoherence which characterized U.S. foreign and defense efforts in the period 1946–1950 and establishing important new lines of policy.”⁷⁸ American involvement resolved that incoherence by matching its perceived sense of threat from the Soviet Union and international communism with policies consistent with it. As new actions were undertaken in at least three areas, the political rhetoric of the late 1940s became the policy of the 1950s.

The first effect of the Korean War was **a sharp increase in the American defense budget and the militarization of NATO**. Although NSC-68 had called for military increases, greater military expenditures did not result until U.S. involvement in Korea and were largely sustained after it. Note from Figure 2.2 how high military spending (either as a percentage of the GNP or as a percentage of the budget) remained throughout much of the 1950s. Similarly, directly on the heels of American involvement in Korea came the establishment of an integrated military structure in NATO and the eventual effort to rearm West Germany. The threat of Soviet expansionism had been made real with the actions in Asia.

A second effect of the Korean War was that it brought home to American policy makers **the need to maintain large armies and to take action against aggression**, wherever it appeared. Limited wars, too, might be necessary, however unpopular.⁷⁹ In this view, if the United States did not confront aggression in one dispute, its resolve in others would be questioned, and, indeed, the Korean experience had raised this doubt. After all, Secretary of State Dean Acheson had seemed to indicate, in a speech in January 1950, that the Korean peninsula was not within America's Asian “defense perimeter.”⁸⁰

A third effect of the Korean War was to solidify the American view that **a Sino–Soviet bloc promoting communist expansion was a reality** and that the need to combat it was real. The Chinese intervention on the side of North Korea illustrated the extent to which the Soviet Union controlled China. Indeed, the view that “China and Russia were inseparable was a product of the war.”⁸¹ Moreover, the various bilateral pacts in Asia were established after the conflict was under way.

In sum, the outbreak of the Korean War and American involvement in it brought about a dramatic correspondence between U.S. policy and actions.

Yet a fourth impact, beyond Jervis's discussion, seems reasonable, especially if we keep in mind the date on which NSC-68 was issued (April 14, 1950) and when the Korean War began (June 25, 1950). In many ways, **the actions in Korea gave further credence to the global portrait outlined in NSC-68**, as well as to the need for rapid changes in the security arrangements of America and the free world. In relatively short order, that is exactly what happened.

A preeminent American diplomatic historian of this generation, John Lewis Gaddis, summarized **the principal importance of the Korean War** in this way: "the real commitment to contain communism everywhere originated in the events surrounding the Korean War, not the crisis in Greece and Turkey [in 1947]."⁸²

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

In Chapter 1, we noted that isolationism and moralism were America's twin legacies from the past. The Cold War and the containment strategy appear to represent a sharp break from this heritage, at least with respect to isolationism. On one level, of course, the United States did abandon isolationism for a **policy of globalism**.⁸³ On another level, this globalism was largely a **unilateralist approach**, a strategy of going it alone in the world or at least of attempting to lead other nations in a particular direction. In other words, much as the original isolationism was unilateralist, so, too, was containment. It represented a strategy by the United States to reshape global order through its own design and largely through its own efforts.

The **heritage of moral principle** is more readily evident in the Cold War period and containment. The universal campaign that the United States initiated was highly consistent with its past: Moral accommodation of Soviet communism, and all communism, was simply not acceptable. In fact, some even sought to "roll back," rather than just contain, it. Like the efforts in America's past (the War of 1812, the Spanish-American War, World War I, and World War II), then, the containment strategy represented an all-out attempt, in this case, to confront the moral challenge from the Soviet Union and all it represented. Moral values, moreover, once again served as a primary justification for American policy.

In the next chapter, we examine more fully the values and beliefs that shaped the U.S. relations with the world during the height of the Cold War. A **Cold War consensus** among American leaders and the public was developing in the late 1940s and the early 1950s, which the Korean War only served to solidify. This consensus provided the rationale for the complete implementation of containment during the rest of the 1950s and 1960s and guided U.S. policy for the next several decades until it was challenged by the emergence of the Sino-Soviet split, the nonaligned movement, the Cuban Missile Crisis, and the Vietnam War.

NOTES

1. Joseph M. Jones, *The Fifteen Weeks* (New York: The Viking Press, 1955), pp. 89–99.
2. The term is from Richard Mayne's Chapter 2 title in *The Recovery of Europe 1945–1973* (Garden City, NY: Anchor, 1973), pp. 27–52. The discussion here draws on this chapter as well as on page 14 on the extent of decolonization.
3. *Ibid.*, pp. 39–40.
4. *Ibid.*
5. Stephen E. Ambrose, *Rise to Globalism: American Foreign Policy 1938–1976* (New York: Penguin Books, 1976), p. 16. A good discussion of the economic strength of the United States in the immediate postwar period can be found in Joan Edelman Spero, *The Politics of International Economic Relations*, 2nd ed. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981), pp. 23–30 and 33–41. The economic data cited are at p. 36.
6. Ambrose, *Rise to Globalism*, p. 16.
7. John Lewis Gaddis, *The United States and the Origins of the Cold War 1941–1947* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1972), p. 1. See also Daniel Yergin, *Shattered Peace: The Origins of the Cold War and the National Security State* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1977), pp. 42–68.
8. Gaddis, *Origins of the Cold War*, p. 2.
9. Yergin, *Shattered Peace*, pp. 43–46.
10. *Ibid.*, pp. 17–68. The quote about Riga is at p. 19.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 55. See the “Grand Alliance” identified at pp. 4 and 49.
12. Michael McGwire, “National Security and Soviet Foreign Policy,” in Melvyn P. Leffler and David S. Painter, eds., *Origins of the Cold War: An International History* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 61.
13. See the discussion of the Yalta agreements in Robert H. Ferrell, *American Diplomacy: A History*, 3rd ed. (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1975), pp. 594–603.
14. *Ibid.*
15. James Lee Ray, *Global Politics*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1983), p. 30.
16. For some evidence that the United States was already planning a sustained global involvement during World War II, see Melvyn P. Leffler, “National Security and U.S. Foreign Policy,” in Melvyn P. Leffler and David S. Painter, eds., *Origins of the Cold War: An International History* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), pp. 18–19.
17. Yergin, *Shattered Peace*, pp. 71–73.
18. *Ibid.* Also see Gaddis, *Origins of the Cold War*, pp. 200–206.
19. Ernest R. May, *“Lessons” of the Past* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), pp. 20–22. The quotation is from p. 22.
20. *Ibid.*, pp. 22–32, discusses these diplomatic assessments and their impact on Truman and his advisors.
21. Harry S. Truman, *Year of Decision* (New York: Doubleday and Co., 1955), p. 99. The earlier passage is quoted in Gaddis, *Origins of the Cold War*, p. 232.
22. For a recent description and assessment of the Potsdam Conference, see Charles L. Mee, Jr., *Meeting at Potsdam* (New York: M. Evans and Co., 1975).
23. Gaddis, *Origins of the Cold War*, pp. 263–281.
24. *Ibid.*, pp. 282–312.
25. Both passages were originally from *Pravda*, the Communist Party newspaper, and were quoted in B. Thomas Trout, “Rhetoric Revisited: Political Legitimation and the Cold War,” *International Studies Quarterly* 19 (September 1975): 264 and 266.
26. The “new war” remark is quoted from *Pravda* and is from Trout, “Rhetoric Revisited,” p. 265, as is this assessment. The second quotation is from Trout at p. 269.
27. The first quote is from Walter Lafeber, *America, Russia, and the Cold War 1945–1975* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1976), p. 39; and the second is from Gaddis, *Origins of the Cold War*, p. 299.
28. The text of this speech can be found in Robert Rhodes James, ed., *Winston S. Churchill, His Complete Speeches 1897–1963, Volume VII: 1943–1949* (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1974), pp. 7285–7293.