America in the world: ideology and U.S. foreign policy, 1944-1950

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Dissertation

AMERICA IN THE WORLD: IDEOLOGY AND U.S. FOREIGN POLICY,
1944-1950

by

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
2013
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Acknowledgements

I have incurred a substantial number of personal and professional debts during my five years in the Ph.D. program at Boston University. I am especially thankful to my adviser, Bill Keylor. He has been a constant source of inspiration and encouragement. Our many discussions in his office about my dissertation and about history in general rank among my most memorable moments of this journey. Bill has always treated me like a colleague rather than a student. He has made me a better and more refined thinker and writer. I cannot thank him enough for that. I am similarly grateful to Andrew Bacevich and David Mayers. Their advice, critique and guidance throughout the dissertation process was of tremendous value. I am incredibly appreciative to Bruce Schulman and Erik Goldstein as well. They joined my project late in the process but never needed any persuasion.

A number of other people in the department have played similarly significant roles. Jim McCann, Cathal Nolan, Charles Dellheim, and Brendan McConville have, all in their very different ways, taught me something about what it means to be an historian and a teacher. Collectively they enriched my knowledge and inspired me to become a scholar. A special thank you goes to Lou Ferleger. As Director of Graduate Studies, as a professor, and as a mentor, he has been a source of inspiration. Lou pushed me to publish my first article, tirelessly read through drafts, and has always been a constant reminder that I have what it takes.

Throughout my time at Boston University, I have been fortunate to have received generous funding from both the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences and the Boston
University History Department. A Dean’s Fellowship, the Engelbourg Travel grant and the Robert V. Shotwell Dissertation Fellowship, allowed me to concentrate on the dissertation. The Department also provided me the opportunity to teach and in the process I encountered a number of amazing students that inspired me to always become a better teacher. Bill Kring, Aura Lunde, Elizabeth Cameron, Scott Haviland, Cristina Inceu, Colin Rosenow, Kristin Wagner, Jason George, Joshua Levkowitz, and many, many more; I owe you a debt of gratitude.

The dissertation journey is by definition a very lonely endeavor in our field but I have been fortunate to share it with an exceptionally talented group of graduate students at Boston University. Many of them have read through portions of this dissertation throughout the process. Their advice, along with the comments provided by Professor Jon Roberts in HI900, helped refine my arguments and thoughts and provided a great collegial experience in the process. Andrew David, Zach Fredman, Francois Lalonde, David Atkinson, Ellen Wald, Andrea Mosterman, David Olson, and many more that have come and gone over the past half-decade, - you have all helped make this a remarkable experience. Most of all, thank you Kate! You kept me sane. Your friendship, help, support and guidance is beyond anything that I could have asked for. I doubt that I could have done this without your presence.

Finally, to Judy, my fellow troublemaker, thank you for your love, support, friendship, and patience throughout the last two years of dissertation writing. Your commitment to your own work provides me with an inspiration that I could never hope to explain in words. Know though, that I am forever grateful. For all of it.
ABSTRACT

The idea that the United States is bequeathed the special mission of leading mankind toward liberty has dominated U.S. foreign relations since the American Revolution. It remains the most pervasive theme in Americans’ thought about the world to the extent that over time, it has become firmly embedded in the nation’s historical and cultural consciousness. A study of diplomatic, intellectual, and cultural history, America in the World: Ideology and U.S. Foreign Policy, 1944-1950 examines the impact of this exceptionalist vision on the policies and public debates that influenced Americans’ thinking about their role in the world from the beginning of their efforts to design the global post-World War II order to the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950. Believers in Lockean progress and advocates of modernization, the administrations of Franklin Roosevelt and Harry Truman sought to establish a one-world order based on American liberal political and economic ideals. At the heart of this American-designed postwar world stood the United Nations, created to ensure collective security and foster a spirit of international collaboration, and transnational institutions like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, envisioned to protect the global economy and promote free trade. These institutions served as concrete articulations of U.S. national interests yet at
the same time they were intended to inaugurate a “New Deal” and a “Fair Deal” for the world. Interpreting American post-war and Cold War policymaking through the lens of exceptionalism provides a complementary methodological framework to the national security or economic theses more commonly employed to describe this period. When the Soviet Union refused to accept the American-designed one-world order, the American response – inside and outside of government – was overwhelmingly shaped by ideology. While economic considerations and national security influenced U.S. Cold War policy, this dissertation demonstrates that it was the challenge posed by Moscow’s universalist aspirations and Communism’s inherent teleological ideology that caused Americans to turn the Cold War into a battle for a way of life.
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<tr>
<td>CIA</td>
<td>Central Intelligence Agency</td>
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<tr>
<td>DCI</td>
<td>Director of Central Intelligence</td>
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<td>IBRD</td>
<td>International Bank of Reconstruction and Development</td>
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<td>IMF</td>
<td>International Monetary Fund</td>
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<td>NATO</td>
<td>North Atlantic Treaty Organization</td>
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<td>NSC</td>
<td>National Security Council</td>
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<td>OSS</td>
<td>Office of Strategic Services</td>
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<td>U.N.</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
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<td>UNAEC</td>
<td>United Nations Atomic Energy Commission</td>
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<td>UNRRA</td>
<td>United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration</td>
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Introduction

“[I]t’s wonderful, this Senate,” Harry Truman quipped as he chatted casually with reporters. A day earlier he had cast his first vote as Vice President, breaking a tie on a foreign aid bill. It is “the greatest place on earth…The grandest bunch of fellows you could ever find anywhere…there isn’t one of them who would be anywhere else if he could.” The Missourian knew what he was talking about. He had served in the upper house of the United States’ Congress for ten years by the time he, with some reluctance, had joined Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s presidential ticket in 1944. Truman enjoyed being back on Capitol Hill. He had been the Vice President for less than three months, but as he told his mother and daughter in a letter later that same afternoon, he already found the job rather numbing and “quite a chore.” It was April 11, 1945.1

The next day, Truman arrived at House Speaker Sam Rayburn’s (D-TX) office around five o’clock for an afternoon drink and possibly a game of cards with his former congressional colleagues. A call came in from Stephen Early, President Roosevelt’s Secretary, asking the Vice President to come to the White House “as quickly and quietly,” as possible. Only stopping by his office to pick up his hat, Truman in his hurry lost his Secret Service detail and arrived at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue just before five thirty. At the White House, he was ushered to the First Family’s private quarters. Outside the door he braced himself, took off his hat, and knocked. He was met inside by Eleanor Roosevelt. The First Lady placed her hand upon his shoulder and said, “Harry. The

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President is dead.” Truman instinctively responded, “Is there anything I can do for you?” “Is there anything I can do for you?” Mrs. Roosevelt replied. “For you are the one in trouble now.”

Albeit for a variety of reasons, many historians concur with Eleanor Roosevelt’s assessment. The task ahead of Harry Truman seemed daunting. Compared with his cosmopolitan, east-coast elite predecessor, the former Senator from Missouri seemed ill-prepared for the Oval Office. He lacked Roosevelt’s charisma and sophistication and was, according to one historian, too “self-deprecating,” “parochial, ill-informed,” and “impatient.” Truman had even become Vice President practically by accident. He owed his presence on the ticket almost exclusively to the fact that between the potential contenders, he was “the man who would hurt FDR the least.” Even after the election, he was never part of the President’s inner circle. The two men had met only a half dozen times before Roosevelt had passed away. More than anything, as the historian William Leuchtenburg explains, Harry Truman was just not Franklin Roosevelt. Few could imagine the Presidency separate from the Squire from Hyde Park. Even Truman

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2 For Truman’s personal account of the events of April 12, 1945, see Ferrell, Off the Record, pp. 14-16.
4 On Roosevelt’s selection of Truman’s as Vice President, see David Pietrusza, 1948: Harry Truman’s Improbable Victory and the Year that Changed America (Union Square Press, 2011), p. 10. Also see, Sean J. Savage, Truman and the Democratic Party (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 1997), pp. 17-21.
struggled to do so. In a letter to Eleanor Roosevelt five months after taking office, he wrote, “I never think of anyone as the President, but Mr. Roosevelt.”

Truman inherited unfinished wars in Europe and the Far East along with a leadership role in his predecessor’s newly designed global postwar order. The United States had been instrumental in establishing the United Nations and designing it to keep international peace and craft a community of nations. Washington had also backed and prepared to bankroll the formation of a new international economic order under the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, which were intended to help alleviate short and long term financial problems around the world and to prevent a global economic relapse. Formidable as these tasks appeared, Truman was not in trouble. Not really. Though he had limited international experience and appeared incapable of fulfilling Roosevelt’s legacy, Truman shared Roosevelt’s basic interpretation of American responsibilities in the world, and he saw himself as the “executor of” FDR’s “estate.”

Like so many Americans born at the close of the nineteenth century, Truman’s worldly political education began in April 1917 when Woodrow Wilson’s rhetoric inspired the formation of his global views. The Wilsonian quest to make the world safe for democracy had left Truman enthusiastically feeling, “like Galahad after the Grail.”

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6 William E. Leuchtenburg, In the Shadow of FDR: From Harry Truman to George W. Bush (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), pp. 7-8. There is a substantial debate among historians as to whether Truman followed the same international policies that Roosevelt would have. We will never know, but the documentary evidence clearly implies that Truman believed he was following Roosevelt’s wishes. For more on this, see in particular Miscamble, From Roosevelt to Truman, pp. 87-123.
Though nearsighted and too old to be drafted, he volunteered for the battle fields of Europe during the most devastating war on record. The combined experience of the First World War and the even more devastating Second World War that soon followed, confirmed to Harry Truman that the United States was the exceptional nation with an obligation to better the conditions of mankind. Twice in three decades, democracy had been fought for; for over a century and a half, Americans had preached it to the world. Like his predecessor, Truman came to believe that liberty would not prosper in a world of desolation. Active American involvement in global affairs was needed to prevent another war. This unique responsibility of leadership hung over Truman’s presidency and the United States as the Second World War ended.

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The idea that, as a unique nation, the United States has been bequeathed the special responsibility of leading the world toward liberty remains the most pervasive in American thought about their nation’s role in the world. As one State Department speaker explained it to an incoming class of Foreign Service Officers in the 1920s, even if the world did not always appreciate the significance of the American role and contribution, this was

only to be expected in a world where gratitude is rarely accorded to the teacher, the doctor, or the policeman, and we have been all three. But it may be that in time they will come to see the United States with different eyes, and to have for her something of the respect and affection with which a man regards the instructor of his youth and a child looks upon the parent who has molded his character.

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The root of this American missionary impulse reaches back to the nation’s founding, and is with us still today. For well over a half century, diplomatic historians – often with little consensus – have debated how or if this impulse aligns with any particular American foreign policy tradition. Thomas Bailey, Bradford Perkins, Walter LaFeber, Robert Ferrell, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., Walter McDougall, H.W. Brands, Walter Russell Mead, Andrew J. Bacevich, Robert Kagan, and many others have attempted to map and penetrate the ideals, habits, attitudes, and visions that over the course of time have defined the United States’ role in the world. Attempting to navigate the ideals that inspire Americans, Mead for example, holds that Americans appear to be either Jeffersonians mainly concerned with being an exemplary democracy for the world, Hamiltonians seeking to connect the national government with American business to integrate and influence the world economy, Jacksonians seeking to maintain national security and military supremacy, or Wilsonians obsessed with international law and the spread of democratic values in the world. Similarly, the scholar and later diplomat Eugene V. Rostow wrote that as Americans, “we embrace contradictory principles with equal fervor and cling to them with equal tenacity. Should our foreign policy be based on

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power or morality? Realism or idealism? Pragmatism or principles? Should its goal be the protection of interests or the promotion of values? Should we be nationalists or internationalists? Liberals or conservatives? We blithely answer. All of the above.”

On one level, the very effort to seek particular and definable principles that guide – or ought to guide – American foreign policy is telling. It demonstrates the peculiar need for purpose that is at the heart of much of American thinking about global affairs. Americans have never been comfortable with the notion that theirs’ is a “normal” nation with traditional nationalistic goals. America has always been an idea rather than a mere patria. On a purely academic level, the vacillation between such seemingly contrasting principles also implies that despite diplomatic historians’ tendency to polarizingly label dominant American policies as “realist” or “idealist,” or to see the United States as driven by either national security or economic interests, no single foreign policy tradition has dominated over time. Perhaps historians’ attempts to categorize the United States’ foreign policy in this fashion simply reflects, as Bernard Bailyn writes, that there always “is a need to extract from the past some kind of bearing on contemporary problems, some message, commentary, or instructions to the writer’s age, and to see reflected in the past familiar aspects of the present.” This explains why scholars of the post-World War-II consensus era rallied to defend the American experiment and U.S. foreign policy, while many scholars of the Vietnam era turned against it. It also explains why so many scholars following the more recent wars in the Middle East have increasingly begun examining

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America’s past in order to establish an imperial thesis explaining American foreign policy.

Rather than seeking to capture one satisfactory American foreign policy tradition from many shifting ones, I wager in this study that when interpreted on the long axis, it is possible to detect an ideological belief rooted in American exceptionalism that has been flexible enough to help influence all of the traditions – and many more – that Rostow outlined. Like historians Michael Hunt and Odd Arne Westad, I use the term ideology – and not, as most diplomatic historians do “worldview” or “mindset” – to define the root and drive of United States’ foreign policy. Unlike these other terms, which better capture a specific moment in time or an era, looking at American foreign policy through the lens of ideology makes it possible, I believe, to detect a fairly comprehensive set of beliefs that over time have influenced the attitudes, beliefs, and actions of large segments of Americans.12 Moreover, Americans have often thought of their role in the world in much the same manner that political ideologues on the left and the right have. As in the case of other major ideologies and indeed religious faiths, the adherents of American exceptionalism subscribe to a shared set of principles and ideals that have proven remarkably consistent over time. Americans latch on to an ideological mission to guide the world in order to prove the universal applicability of their ideas as they relate, for example, to individual and often corporate liberties. The underpinning of this conviction cannot be located in any one foreign policy philosophy. There are no stone tablets. There

is no manifesto. American exceptionalist ideology is organic. It reflects perceptions, whether real or imagined, of destiny and progress. It transcends time and, like other ideologies, its visions also transcend borders.

The ambitious nature of the American experiment explains why scholars of colonial America now think of the American Revolution as a fundamentally ideological event. It institutionalized the rhetoric of exceptionalism and created a fundamental shift in the ideas and values that shaped the national culture. And yet, these ideals have been evident far beyond the revolutionary era; the missionary rhetoric that bolstered them would have sounded recognizable to every American generation since. It, therefore, makes sense to speak of an American exceptionalist ideology that goes back well over two centuries. It is an “evolving ideology into which generational experiences are interpreted and perceptual conflicts resolved.” Acknowledging the ideological nature of these ideals allows us to better explain why Americans remain so determined that theirs’ is the exceptional and the indispensable nation.

This emphasis on the significance of ideology should not be taken to mean that I believe that reason rather than passion directs American foreign policy. Nor should it be taken to mean that American self-interests have not been critical to U.S. relations with the world. Political, economic, and military matters are significant forces that powerfully influence action. Lewis Namier’s argument that “what matters most is the underlying emotions, the music, to which ideas are a mere libretto,” has real merit. Nevertheless,

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ideas are products of the national consciousness; they are reflections of culture and society, two entities – as Gordon Wood reminds us – that are not really separate. As such, ideas do no “exist apart from...some more real world of economic behavior.”\textsuperscript{15} They provide meaning to action. Exceptionalist ideas, therefore, more often than not, reinforce perceptions of economic interests and national security rather than exist in opposition to these concepts. Displaying little sensitivity toward other cultures and often disregarding the practical applicability of their ideas, Americans have steadily held that the best way to secure their way of life and the nation’s own interest is to export its values. Teleology is central to the American mission: “what is America today will be the world tomorrow.”\textsuperscript{16} In truth, the world Americans have inspired to create has often looked more like the folklorishly perfect America they imagined than the imperfect world they have actually inhabited. Yet, in a manner consistent with other ideologues, Americans have, over the course of more than two centuries, brushed off their nation’s own flaws while at the same time insisting that others would be improved if they embraced American values. Slavery, poverty, racism, political inequality, economic depression, Civil War, and violence have not caused them to question that other nations and regions would be better off if they looked more and acted more like the U.S.

Critics point to Americans’ record in the world as proof that such rhetoric is at best hypocrisy and at worst down-right dishonesty. They insist that eloquent oratory of democracy and freedom is nothing more than a Wilsonian façade for economic and imperial motives. Certainly American foreign policy has often been imprudent,
incompetent, and brutal. Efforts directed against Native Americans and blacks on the North American continent and against the Philippines, Vietnamese, and plenty of others have come with tremendous destruction and violence. Yet, at the same time, I do not believe that we cannot hope to understand American foreign policy culture apart from how Americans thought and spoke about their actions. Following Walter McDougall, I would venture that rather than dividing policies between the pragmatic and the moral, the realistic and idealistic, Americans instead have shown a propensity for bringing these dichotomies into alignment with one another. Rationalization of U.S. foreign policy almost always comes in the form of moralization. In a manner quite unique among the liberal democracies, Americans convert their preferences into values and explain foreign policy as part of a grand universal design. This, Americans, inside and outside of government, tend to do in a manner that is reminiscent of a people driven by ideology and faith; it has allowed Americans to disregard “the other” and to label enemies as threats to the American way of life.

This tendency in to view the world as black and white is possible not because the public is somehow manipulated into accepting this national discourse, but because the image of the exceptional nation is so deeply embedded in the national consciousness that it can be summoned almost mechanically from its citizens. Any account that trivializes Americans’ faith in the superiority of their ideals or that obfuscates their conviction that they are engaged in a universal struggle for mankind misses an imperative part of Americans’ natural belief system and, as a result, of how and why their nation acts as it does in the world.
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This study is not a tribute to U.S. foreign policy over time. It is an attempt to chart the
ideas that influence the American role in the world. A synthesis of diplomatic,
intellectual, and cultural history, it applies the influence and perception of exceptionalist
ideology to the policies and public debates that influenced Americans’ thinking about
their role in the world from their early efforts to plan the global post-World War II order
in 1943 and 1944 to the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950. This chosen periodization is
not meant to imply that American exceptionalist ideology was limited to this particular
era, but rather that it was particularly important during these years, in which the United
States, perhaps more so than ever before or since, shaped the development of the
international arena.

Based on records from the Truman Administration, the State Department, and
other official agencies and departments, as well as an extensive reading of journals and
newspapers, the core emphasis of this study is on how Americans thought, wrote,
expressed, and executed their policies; it does not aim to examine the successes and
failures of such policies, but rather the motivations behind them. From the earliest
postwar design of a new Americanized liberal economic and political order, through the
drive to end imperialism and institutionalize human rights, to their attempts to
internationalize atomic weapons and energy – which is to say from the Atlantic Charter
through the first eighteen months of the United Nations’ existence, Americans sought to
design a new one-world order in which their values dominated. When this effort failed as
the Soviet Union undermined the American-designed U.N., erected the iron curtain to
divide Europe, independently sought to build atomic weapons, and contributed to Communism’s march on in Asia – which is to say from the Truman Doctrine to the outbreak of the Korean War, Americans’ powerful ideological persuasion manifested itself in a number of policy initiatives and in the public’s views of the Cold War, to the extent that exceptionalism was the most important factor influencing key U.S. foreign policy decisions.

The first chapter of this study provides the methodological basis for the remainder of the work. It defines the meaning and usefulness of ideology as a vehicle for the analysis of United States’ foreign policy. While presenting an overview of the historiographical debate over U.S. Cold War policies, this chapter provides the intellectual context necessary to interpret American foreign policy through the lens of ideology. Attempting to avoid a narrow emphasis on ideology that is limited to total or extremist ideals confined to manifestos or dogmatic thinking, I approach American ideology as a force akin to a faith that people subscribe to, one that provides guidance and belief in progress. I locate American exceptionalist ideology as anchored in the historical and cultural consciousness of the nation. Inspired by ideas of America’s past and visions for its future, I present it as a defining component of American national self-perception that helps explain the beliefs, morals and attitudes that influence Americans’ behavior and have helped to create socially established structures of meaning to Americans’ role in the world.

To make evident that American exceptionalism was not merely a rhetorical invention by Cold War politicians seeking a means to an end, the second chapter outlines
the historical roots and evolution of this intellectual framework. Surveying America’s role in the world from the Revolution to the Second World War, it explores the ideological and political origins and developments of American exceptionalism among intellectuals and politicians. During this period, Americans became increasingly convinced that their nation was more egalitarian than, and qualitatively unlike, the old European world. Even as they perceived the unique nature of their own society, Americans debated the opportunities their ideology presented them with and the responsibilities it bestowed upon them. While few questioned that Americans possessed a special global mission to lead others towards liberty, there was decided disagreement over the nature of this responsibility. Was it enough to be an exemplar of democracy from which others could draw inspiration, or did the unique qualities inherent in American thought and society demand a more activist approach to bringing democracy to the world? Though the more conservative method favored by men like John Quincy Adams won out in the early years, the missionary impulse and the increasing conviction that universalistic foreign ideologies threatened the American role in the world ensured that the U.S. would, by the twentieth century, become an actively interventionist power.

Chapter three goes on to explain how this interventionism rooted in exceptionalism inspired the United States’ role during the Second World War. The war provided an opportunity for atonement to many Americans. After Woodrow Wilson’s failure to institute an effective League of Nations in the aftermath of the Great War, Americans embraced a mission to design a world order inspired by their political ideas and values. President Franklin Roosevelt and Secretary of State Cordell Hull set out to
create a one-world order dominated by a strong United Nations and effective economic organizations intended to promote free trade and democracy. They also pursued the dismantlement of the European empires, the formal institutionalization of human rights in the world, and hoped to establish a world in which ideologues on the left and the right would turn toward a liberal American model. These plans met resistance from Winston Churchill, who clung to the remaining influence of the British Empire, and from Josef Stalin, whose own political and ideological ambitions directly contradicted Washington’s. These disagreements between the United States, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union resulted in compromises that created deep institutional and bureaucratic flaws in the new international economic organizations established at Bretton Woods in 1944 and the United Nations inaugurated in the summer of 1945. As time would tell, these flaws would come to endanger the American one-world vision.

Despite these difficulties among the great powers, Americans entered the postwar with a tremendous sense of optimism that their era had finally arrived. As chapter four illustrates, Americans embraced the idea that their new postwar order represented the beginning of a new and peaceful world. Although some intellectuals, columnists, and diplomats warned that collaboration with the Soviet Union in this new world order would prove impossible and contended that nationalistic goals were likely to always trump any international unity, the Truman Administration did not expect or plan for a Cold War. During the first eighteen months of the postwar era, Americans remained committed to the United Nations to an extent that is often overlooked by current scholars. The United Nations’ later shortcomings have caused many diplomatic historians to dismiss it as
bureaucratic behemoth, but in its early years Americans held tremendous faith that it would serve as the arbiter of international disputes and protect small nations from imperial and totalitarian ambitions. This design, however, always relied on the other great powers’ will to fall in line with American ideals. During 1946, these hopes slowly eroded as the Soviet Union refused American-designed plans for international oversight of atomic energy and weaponry, refused to participate in the international economic order, and increasingly attempted to secure influence in Europe and the Near East.

In a world dominated by a traditional balance of power structure, the Soviet Union’s appetite for influence and Stalin’s need for security might have been met with customary acknowledgement and acceptance in Washington. As chapter five demonstrates, however, American ideological perceptions of the world made such a scenario unacceptable. By early 1947, Washington recognized that the goal of a united one-world was all but impossible. The Soviets’ position on the developing civil war in Greece and the increasingly aggressive Communist actions across Europe and elsewhere led Americans to conclude that despite the hopes Roosevelt and Truman had entrusted in Moscow, the Soviet Union was, after all, just another totalitarian and ideological power bent on extending its influence and control over other nations. As a result, throughout 1947 and 1948, Washington came to view the Soviet Union as a threat determined on destroying the very world order Washington had previously hoped they would help champion. The global ideals inherent in U.S. ideology caused Americans to interpret the Soviet threat in much the same manner as they had the Confederacy and Nazi Germany. Once Americans reached that conclusion, American exceptionalism turned the Cold War
into an ideological conflict. Convinced that Communism’s universalistic mission constituted a world-wide threat, the Truman Administration, strongly backed by the American people, turned the Cold War into a battle for ways of life.

The final chapter examines the first eighteen months of the second Truman Administration. This period between January 1949 and the early fall of 1950 captures the stranglehold that ideology had on Americans’ thinking about their own role in the world better than any other period in the pre-Vietnam era. The enthusiasm shown by the Administration and the public for the melioristic Point Four program that President Truman’s presented in January 1949 demonstrates that the American mission in the world was about more than just fighting Communism. American foreign policy also contained a positive agent that sought to bring progress and modernization. Such progress was expected to bring access to markets and increased trade, while simultaneously ensuring that underdeveloped nations did not fall within the Communist sphere. At the same time, Americans could not escape the fact that, like Communism, their own exceptionalism was, at heart, an international ideology with a universal mission. This became increasingly clear with their response to the Soviet Union’s acquisition of an atomic weapon, Mao Tse-Tung’s rise to power in China, and the attack by Communist North Korea on the U.N.-created and sponsored Republic of Korea. Collectively, these events inspired a response from the American public and from the American government that reflected the long held view that liberty’s salvation depended on the United States.
1. Ideology and American Foreign Policy: A Method

Perhaps the sentiments contained in the following pages, are not yet sufficiently fashionable to procure them general favor; a long habit of not thinking a thing wrong, gives it a superficial appearance of being right, and raises at first a formidable outcry of custom.

Thomas Paine, Common Sense, January, 1776

“This is a little book about a big and very slippery subject.” So began Michael Hunt’s Ideology and U.S. Foreign Policy first published in 1987. It remains the seminal work on the relationship between ideology and the evolution of American foreign policy. Although originally hailed by fellow historians as innovative and path-breaking, little serious scholarship followed Hunt on this topic. Just as he feared, diplomatic historians have continued to treat the idea of American ideology “only infrequently and even then perfunctorily.”¹

In Cold War studies, scholars have increasingly become comfortable with making ideology an important part of Moscow’s and Beijing’s foreign policies but “many people in the field find it much more difficult to deal with U.S. elite ideology as a meaningful

¹ Michael H. Hunt, Ideology and U.S. Foreign Policy (Yale University Press, 2nd edition, 2009), p. xi. The lack of attention to American ideology is evident even in the most important works on American Cold War foreign policy. See, for example, Michael J. Hogan, The Marshall Plan: America, Britain, and the Reconstruction of Western Europe, 1947-1952 (Cambridge University Press, 1989); John Lewis Gaddis, We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History (New York, 1997); Marc Trachtenberg, A Constructed Peace: The Making of the European Settlement, 1945-1963 (Princeton University Press, 1999); Melvyn P. Leffler, A Preponderance of Power: National Security, the Truman Administration, and the Cold War, (Stanford University Press, 1991). In a later work, Leffler came closer to detecting a correlation between ideas and political action. However, he still refrained from integrating ideology as a meaningful tool for understanding the U.S. broadly, see his, For the Soul of Mankind: The United States, The Soviet Union, and the Cold War (Hill and Want, 2006).
concept.” 2 Diplomatic historians in particular continue to balk at the idea. The complexity of American society and the nature of its democratic institutions lead many to believe that the United States is too politically divided and too ethnically and socially diverse to be labeled “ideological.” As has been the case since the end of the Second World War, modern interpretations of American foreign policy instead put emphasis on causality rather than ideas. American actions around the world are generally explained by national interests, strategic interests, national security, economic interests, or occasionally by the constraints of domestic social realities.3

In part, the reason for this is methodological. Diplomatic historians remain committed to official sources such as government archives, diplomatic cables, and national security directives. They believe – quite rightly – that political power and sovereignty matter in the study of foreign affairs.4 One unfortunate consequence of this, however, is that while there today is a greater emphasis on the relationship between

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4 Cold War studies have, of course, evolved tremendously over the past three decades. We now study the Cold War from a multitude of angles: as a history of the Soviet Union, as a history of Eastern Europe, as a history of Third World Revolutions, as a history of the Non-aligned Movement, as a history of race, as a history of gender, as a history of economic globalization, as a history of imperialism, as a history of non-governmental organizations, and as international history. Terms like nationalism, corporatism, dependency, modernization, post-colonialism, transnationalism, and empire are now household names in the Cold War historiography. But while all of this has improved the field tremendously, diplomatic historians continue largely to disregard ideas. Ideology remains largely absent as a serious vehicle for examining American foreign policy.
culture and foreign policymaking, most scholars are fundamentally uncomfortable with the history of international relations as intellectual history. They dismiss the premise that ideas drive political change and put aside the suggestion that ideas cause human behavior. In this they may be correct; however, even so, it does not follow that ideas are an unimportant or even marginal factor behind American foreign policymaking. Ideas accompany actions, and American ideology – in this work referred to as “American exceptionalist ideology” – is in fact a far more influential, far more pervasive, and far less theoretical idea within American history and culture than is generally acknowledged. At its core, American exceptionalism is about faith and what Americans believe their role in the world to be. By faith I do not mean to imply that American exceptionalism is a religion per se, but rather that in men’s minds, ideology operates in a manner that is comparable to faith. Dismissing these beliefs – this faith – as extraneous to U.S. foreign policy, or, as most scholars do, cavalierly invoking ideology while leaving it unexplained, creates a methodological imbalance that skews our understanding of what drives and inspires the United States as a country. History, after all, is not made up entirely of material sources, but also of what men and women think and believe. Ideas provide meaning to actions, and there is hardly anything that men do to which they do not attribute meaning.5

The preoccupation with American ideology in this work stems from the belief that ideas matter in American foreign policy; that they are in fact fundamental, not incidental,

to the manner in which the United States acts in the world. This preoccupation rests on a conviction that ideas and rhetoric are essential to behavior; that there is little political behavior without ideas. On the issue of American Cold War policy, my emphasis on the importance of ideas also stems from a dissatisfaction with much current scholarship’s apparent belief that the only interesting or debatable aspect regarding Washington’s Cold War is the accuracy and appropriateness of its response to the threat, whether real or imagined, posed by international Communism. Failing to recognize that American exceptionalism shares an inherently optimistic and progressive interpretation of history with other major ideologies, many scholars continue to largely portray others as ideological and Americans as fully rational. Greater attention to what policy makers believed in the past and how these thoughts entered – and continue to enter – into the making of political events implies a far more complex American reality. This reality goes beyond matters of national interest and security; it is a reality closely tied to the American language, culture, beliefs, traditions, and history. The basic premise that ideas are significant raises key questions about the importance of the relationship between the nation’s values and its actions that forces us to emphasize more closely the links between national self-perception and foreign policy.

Defining what ideology is and how it operates culturally, socially, and politically is, however, a complex endeavor. As one scholar observes, “the growing popularity of the term has been matched, if anything, by its growing obscurity.” Another insists that a plunge into “the cold and murky waters of the literature on ‘ideology’ is a shocking and
disillusioning experience.”6 Across the fields of history, political science, philosophy, and literary theory, well over twenty varying definitions of ideology circulate freely, none ostensibly more or less accepted than the rest. Opaque rather than transparent, theoretical rather than practical, and philosophical rather than empirical, the study of ideology is not for the faint at heart. Despite this forewarning, historians interested in a deeper and more satisfying explanation of the conduct and evolution of American foreign policy would do well to look to ideology as a methodological or explanatory vehicle.

In order for ideology to be useful as a central component in the study of American Cold War policy, we need to widen its definition beyond the perception of total or extremist ideals rooted in narrow manifestos. At the same time we must avoid extending its meaning to such a degree that it becomes analytically impractical. It is necessary to establish a definition that encompasses not simply “a written tradition of authoritative texts and their exegesis but also credenda formed by personal and historical experience.”7 Here I broadly follow the cultural anthropologist Clifford Geertz’ view of ideology as a coherent system of symbols, values, and beliefs that carries social meaning. In Geertz’ framework, ideology both shapes and communicates social reality. It is located in symbols and rituals throughout society, not simply within individuals. In his works,

ideology operates as a method through which societies define their collective culture based on ideas, beliefs, and historical consciousness.\(^8\)

I define ideology as a set of ideas and beliefs, sometimes only poorly or partially articulated, that both establish and justify general outlines – rather than specific blueprints – of the world’s future political, social, and cultural order. This same set of ideas and dogmas also outline the methods, if not a finite path, necessary to achieve this order. This definition, combined with a greater emphasis on how culture helps to provide meaning to policy, holds great promise for shaping our perceptions of how ideology functions politically and societally, and thus, our perception of how ideology influences foreign policy as well. Where this study diverges from Geertz, is in its effort to lift ideology from the theoretical to the practical realm. A social theory, after all, is only as useful as its applicability.\(^9\)

This work emphasizes ideologies as grand ideas. Only ideas that are global in scope and contain a universalist purpose will be viewed as ideologies. In the case of the United States, such universalist perceptions can be traced to the colonists’ earliest convictions of providentialism. The poet Philip Freneau’s captured this in his view of

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America as “a New Jerusalem sent down from heaven” with a special mission.\textsuperscript{10} It is this mission that forms the heart of American exceptionalism: the conviction that there is a distinguishable and superior American quality that endows the United States with the duty and the moral imperative to spread its ideals around the world; that the unique nature of U.S. democratic ideas, humane ideals, and the superiority of its freedoms ordains Americans with the ability, the authority, and the responsibility to remake the world in their own image. This mission is distinguished by normative values that serve as guides for action, as an analysis of reality, and as a basis for political vindication.

Born out of revolution against the perceived English tyranny, Americans discovered this vindication in the noble values and the high aspirations that from the early republic infused their national self-perception. But theirs was not a nationalism comparable to that of any other people. The colonists who declared independence in 1776 gave birth not just to a nation, but to an idea. To be an American meant to believe in something.\textsuperscript{11} The colonists ignited a belief in freedom and equality among men; they gave birth to the conviction that Americans are a unique people endowed with a special mission to lead the world down the path to liberty. These values have been nourished and sustained by the nation’s historical and cultural consciousness, and they have stood the test of time. For almost two and a half centuries they have shaped a language that is distinctively American and overwhelmingly ideological. Most notably, these values have shaped the United States into a nation that sees itself as the principal enforcer – or at least


\textsuperscript{11} Wood, \textit{The Idea of America}, p. 322.
the primary example – of moral good in a sinful world. Over time this established the conviction that global peace, the spread of freedom, and world-wide social and economic progress would only be possible with America in the vanguard. While most Europeans lost much of their Enlightenment-era inspired confidence in progress somewhere between Verdun and Auschwitz, Americans have retained their faith. Rather than allow the carnage of their own Civil War to rob them of their faith in progress, Americans concluded that good can triumph over man’s flaws. If anything, the Civil War appeared to provide the United States with a certain moral capital. Although that war had not begun as one for democracy and freedom, by mid-war it was being fought for those exact ideals. The Gettysburg address confirmed this. As a result, the Union victory only served to foster beliefs in an idealized version of the American dream for the world that deeply shaped the makeup of the nation’s foreign policy culture, and deeply influenced how Americans view their global role.

As in all ideologies, the central tenet of American exceptionalism is this belief in human progress. Like all men and women of faith, ideologues create and carry a framework for understanding their particular place and function in the world. To them, “the shape of the future, the nature of historical change, and the limits and possibilities of human control over these changes, become questions of overwhelming importance.”12 This natural interest in progress ensures an instinctive concern with the future of human society that is also greatly influenced by how the past and the present are perceived. Ideologues look inward to their belief system for self-identification and definitions of

virtues, and they look outward on to a world they see as in need of their values. They look back into the past and see mankind’s deficiencies and lost ideals. They look towards the future, convinced that history is on their side, and assume that the purity of their values is destined to steer and improve the course of human development.  

It follows, naturally, from these definitions that not every political direction, movement or idealistic perception properly qualifies as an ideology. Liberalism, conservatism, modern day socialism, libertarianism, humanitarianism, environmentalism, feminism, and pacifism are not considered ideologies under this definition. Political direction or opportunism does not equal ideology. Although they all rest on or proclaim political or societal ideas, they are all conceptually narrow, and not one of them contains a comprehensively clear or global message. While they may have social or political goals, they lack the natural perception of comprehensive advancement essential to an ideology. American exceptionalist ideology, on the other hand, is profoundly different. It has purpose, direction, and definable qualities. Its structure is integral to the self-defined identity of the American people. Americans rarely question the preeminence of their ideas, values, or political system; they have faith in their destiny. This exceptionalist ideology provides a theology that is overwhelming, deep, and powerful for the individual and the collective alike. In this sense, American ideology shares traits not only with the French revolutionary ideals to liberate all men but also with fascism, Nazism, international Communism, and, in some respects, the Japanese idealism and racial ideology of the nineteen twenties, thirties, and forties. Each of these ideologies

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envisioned some form of a new world order that would come about by their doing. This does not mean that these ideas are morally equivalent, rather that they are similarly principled. They view other forms of government systems at best as wrong, and at worst as fundamentally illegitimate.

This characteristic of American exceptionalist ideology, along with the others previously discussed, made it inevitable that the United States would perceive the ideological nature of the Soviet Union as a threat once the Second World War came to a close. The communists imagined themselves as guides to enlightenment in an ominous and misguided world. Americans viewed themselves in the same light. Both maintained a universalistic ideology. Both advanced a vision for the future of mankind. This guaranteed, as the diplomat George Kennan wrote in the Long Telegram, that “no permanent modus-vivendi” was possible.14 It made normal diplomacy impossible. As president at the onset of the Cold War, Harry Truman asserted that only in a world dominated by American ideals of freedom, prosperity, economic liberalism, global peace, and democracy could Americans feel secure. Only in such a world could America’s ideals prosper. This belief signaled a return to the policy of unconditional surrender, and made the Cold War the battle of the century for the century. It ensured, as one former president succinctly put it, that the conflict with the Soviet Union would not be one for territory or glory, but “for the very soul of mankind.”15

In this context, open-mindedness towards ideology and the influence of cultural and historical consciousness becomes particularly important if scholars hope to understand U.S. foreign policy on the long axis. Yet, such a broad approach has never been much in vogue among diplomatic historians. Three decades ago, the Harvard historian Charles S. Maier, lamented how Leopold Von Ranke’s old field was languishing. He claimed that diplomatic history, once among the discipline’s flagships, had simply become “the step-child” of American history. Historians of U.S. foreign relations lacked a coherent and competent methodology; they cast their inquiries too narrowly, and their perspectives too parochially. A majority of them ignored the new techniques and perspectives of social history, cultural history, and the social sciences. If diplomatic historians continued such resistance to new ideas, Maier warned, the field risked losing its vitality and usefulness. The Stanford professor Gordon A. Craig echoed these concerns in his 1982 presidential address to the American Historical Association. Calling for a greater inter-disciplinary approach and theoretical emphasis, he insisted that diplomatic historians should not be afraid “on the basis of similarity, [to] treat unique cases as members of a class or type of phenomenon and, by appropriate methods of analysis, discover correlations among different variables that may have causal significance or, at the very least, serve as indicators of predictive value.”

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16 Charles S. Maier “Marking Time: The Historiography of International Relations” in *The Past Before Us: Contemporary Historical Writing in the United States*, ed. Michael Kammen (Ithaca, NY, 1980), pp. 355-387. Maier’s essay is the most lucid on the topic of the need for new techniques and perspectives when analyzing history. His was also the one that drew the most attention from diplomatic historians. He was not the first, however, to point out the challenge facing diplomatic history. See, Thomas J. McCormick, “The
Neither Maier nor Craig wanted the study of ideas to replace narratives in international relations history. They were not calling for an end to the study of wars, elections, peace conferences, international organizations, national security concerns, or great power politics in general. They were asking for more breadth and depth. Maier, in particular, charged that diplomatic historians’ traditional attachment to official government sources and their emphasis on political elites lent itself poorly to the increasingly popular idea of history written from the bottom up. He argued that a greater open-mindedness to culture, race, gender, and methods stemming from other disciplines would lead to more nuanced studies of history. Both men’s message was that a greater emphasis on social settings broadly understood would help diplomatic historians make sense of policymaking and the forces that drive it.17

The call here for a greater emphasis on ideology as a vehicle for understanding American foreign policy challenges large parts of the last six decades of U.S. foreign policy historiography. Historians and political commentators have consistently attributed ideological convictions to America’s enemies, but have not viewed the United States in the same light. Rather, the United States has largely been considered rational (although not always right) when compared with Nazism and international communism. A similar


17 Although most diplomatic historians thought Maier’s jeremiad exaggerated the field’s state of affairs, many agreed that new approaches and the use of new and broader sources would help inject life into diplomatic history. In 1981, Warren I. Cohen, then the editor of Diplomatic History, invited a number of diplomatic historians to respond to Maier’s charges. For a record of these excellent commentaries written by Michael H. Hunt, Akira Iriye, Walter LaFeber, Robert D. Schulzinger, Melvyn P. Leffler, and Joan Hoff-Wilson, see Diplomatic History vol. 5, no. 4 (Fall, 1981), pp. 354-382.
logic prevails in the current struggle against radical Islam. This argument for American “reason” became particularly prevalent by the middle of the twentieth century. The military havoc wreaked by the Europeans between 1914 and 1945 caused Americans more clearly to distinguish themselves from the rest of the world as rational and averse to ideological fervor. Among the most influential voices advocating this position was University of Chicago sociologist Edward Shils. He defined ideology narrowly and rigidly as a clear and consistent belief system obsessed with totality. Doctrinaire at its core, guided by explicit, consciously held convictions, and entirely resistant to new information, ideologies, Shils insisted, asserted total possession over social and political truth. Although he and other scholars conceded that at times American leaders had lamentably fallen under the sway of moralism, Shils rejected the notion that U.S. statesmen were ideologues.

This logic aligned Shils with some of the most powerful intellectual voices of the post-war era. Among them were fellow sociologists Daniel Bell and Seymour Martin Lipset, the French political theorist Raymond Aron, George F. Kennan, and historians Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. and E. H. Carr. Writing during an era of relative American national unity and cultural and political consensus, Bell’s influential “end of ideology” thesis claimed that the political liberalism and the social and cultural freedoms available to Americans made ideology untenable in the United States. The country was too organic in its thinking, too open-minded, and too intellectually flexible to inspire mass mobilization, and, therefore, was un-receptive to ideology. Ideological demagoguery was
reserved for America’s enemies.\(^{18}\) It was reserved for the extreme right and the extreme left.

The most powerful statement in this regard, one from which Shils drew much inspiration, came from the German émigré Hans Joachim Morgenthau. A staunch anti-totalitarian, Morgenthau went even further by challenging ideology in principle. A prolific writer, international relations theorist, and the doyen of post-war realist theory, Morgenthau labeled ideology irrelevant and an intellectual invention that concealed the true substance of policy decisions. He denied that ideology determined foreign policy. National interest and national security did. Ideologies, he believed, were little more than rhetorical illusions that wrongly subordinated human rationality to external social and idealistic influences and had little or no use for determining how states act in the world.

To Morgenthau and his realist disciples, ideology – regardless of its name – was not a belief but a tactic employed to manipulate those under its control. Realists contrasted ideology, which they regarded as extreme in its recklessness, propaganda driven, a distortion of human thought manufactured to marshal mass support on the basis of irrational arguments, with truth and valid knowledge in general.\(^ {19}\) Although not all realist


scholars shared this unmitigated rejection, their view that only political beliefs obsessed with totality could be considered ideological demonstrated their basic refutation of the concept. Since behavior and belief never correspond empirically to describe social conditions or political developments, realists deliberately strangled ideology as a meaningful theory by reducing it to a dead-end concept with no added intellectual significance.

Although largely academic at heart – and generally in denial about the power and influence of communist ideology – the realist school of thought inevitably became wrapped up in the Cold War that broke out just as Morgenthau’s most important works were coming off the press. Seeking to explain the origins of the brewing East-West conflict, the realists’ vocabulary emphasized national security, geo-politics, and vital interests, while dismissing the importance of ideas. In the process, they came to play a prominent role in defining what became known as the orthodox interpretation of the Cold War. The orthodox thesis claimed that America was drawn into the conflict as a measured response to Josef Stalin’s aggression in Europe and the Middle East, by his unilateral unwillingness to pursue amicable relations with the West, and by his rejection of normal diplomacy after 1945.\textsuperscript{20} Realists did not deny that the United States pursued

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\textsuperscript{20} Although some of the arguments made by the orthodox school are no longer in vogue, access to Eastern European archives after the end of the Cold War confirmed that many of their most substantial arguments were correct. For some of the most important works, see William Henry Chamberlain, \textit{America’s Second Crusade} (Chicago, 1950); Herbert Feis, \textit{Churchill, Roosevelt, Stalin: The War they Waged and the Peace
economic interests around the world, but this was secondary to, if not always detached
from, security concerns. In their view the international communist movement’s
commitment to the overthrow of capitalism and liberal democracy constituted a clear and
present danger to the United States. Washington’s Cold War was one of self-defense not
desire or design.  

This argument dominated intellectual foreign policy thought until the so-called
Wisconsin School Cold War revisionists – most often associated with the New Left –
shattered the post-war consensus in the early sixties. Fathered by historian William
Applemann Williams and guided by his 1959 *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy*, Cold
War revisionists charged that economic interests and the collaboration between business
interests and power politics drove American foreign policy. They traced this theory to
Secretary of State John Hay’s turn of the century Open Door Notes, intended to ensure
American access to the traditionally European dominated areas in China. In pursuit of
profit, the upper echelons of the political system and the business elite in the United
States – those whose privileges depended on economic growth – advocated overseas
economic expansion and involvements around the world. The Open Door thesis’
emphasis on access to foreign markets, which, in part, drew from Robinson and
Gallagher’s argument about imperialism, became the dominating theme of Williams’

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21 The Realist school still continues to flourish. For two more recent examples, see: Craig and Logevall, *America’s Cold War* and Norman Graebner, Richard Dean Burns, and Joseph M. Siracusa’s *America and the Cold War, 1941-1991: A Realist Interpretation* 2 volumes (Praeger, 2010). Graebner et all actually argue that the United States was excessively ideological during the Cold War, but they provide no substantial explanation of ideology. As a result, their work becomes little more than a vehicle to criticize Washington for having exaggerated the threat posed by the Soviet Union and for criticizing U.S. interventions in the third world.
interpretation of Washington’s foreign policy. Although not Marxists – at least not committed ones – Williams and his followers insisted that inherent economic needs combined with historical and geographical confinement led the United States to seek outlets for surplus production. The opportunities provided by the open door helped prevent social unrest at home and eradicate concerns about America’s domestic imperfections. Williams challenged Americans who, until this point, believed foreign policy to be largely responsive and inherently good – a force of freedom standing up against authoritarians like Kaiser Wilhelm, Adolf Hitler, and Josef Stalin – to acknowledge that the quest for economic expansion was the predominant catalyst for actions abroad. American Cold War foreign policy was neither intended to prevent a power vacuum in Europe nor was it a missionary effort. America, Williams insisted, did not have evil intentions, but such were the unintended – tragic in Williams’ words – consequences of American diplomacy. Its quest for economic expansion laid the foundation for an American empire overseas. Responsibility for the Cold War, Williams insisted, rested not with Stalin, who sought only security, but with the United States for its refusal to cooperate and its constant search for profit.


At stake between realists and revisionists was not only the historical interpretation of the Cold War, but also politics. Polemics rather than history characterized many of the works on both sides. Out of this hyperbolic fracas arose what came to be known as Cold War post-revisionism in the 1970s. Tempered by the Vietnam War and Watergate, inspired by détente, and frustrated by the increasingly counter-productive realist-revisionist debate, post-revisionists sought a return to a more fact-based and less emotional analysis of history. Championed by John Lewis Gaddis and a number of younger diplomatic historians, a general consensus emerged that while Stalin and the Soviet Union remained principally responsible for the Cold War, the Truman Administration’s aggressive rhetoric and exaggerations of the communist threat had helped spark the conflict’s outbreak. This search for a neutral synthesis resulted in some outstanding pieces of scholarship. Unfortunately, the post-revisionist emphasis on policymaking and state conflicts caused these historians to tone down the importance of

and Potsdam; The Use of the Atomic Bomb and the American Confrontation with Soviet Power (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1965). For a more recent example of the continued depth of Williams’ influence, see Jackson Lears, Rebirth of a Nation: the Making of Modern America, 1877-1920 (Harper Collins, 2009). Although never a true revisionist, Melvyn Leffler aligned himself closely with a great deal of revisionist thought in 1994, see his, The Specter of Communism: the United States and the Origins of the Cold War 1917-1953 (Hill & Wang, 1994). In recent years, the revisionist thesis has inspired a rapidly growing cottage industry that supports many of Williams’ conclusions about an American empire. These scholars define U.S. foreign policy as aggressive and in search of global hegemony without the messy consequences of colonies. Instead of ruling colonies, the U.S. creates client states. Rather than intervene militarily, Washington allows totalitarian rule in its client states as long as U.S. regional influence and profit is not under threat. The American empire thesis’ central argument is that an understanding of the existence of American empire is fundamental to any understanding of American foreign policy. While they have inspired a great degree of applause by expertly pointing out that the U.S. has not always been a benevolent power, their insistence on the existence of an American empire remains fundamentally unconvincing to me. For some of their most influential works, see: Bacevich, American Empire: the Realities and Consequences of U.S. Foreign Policy; Chalmers Johnson, Dismantling the Empire: America’s Last Best Hope (Metropolitan Books, 2010); William Pfaff, The Irony of Manifest Destiny: The Tragedy of America’s Foreign Policy (Walker & Company, 2010); Walter Hixson, The Myth of American Diplomacy: National Identity and U.S. Foreign Policy (Yale University Press, 2008).
ideology, culture, and ideas, rationalizing that these concepts – in both Moscow and Washington – were largely secondary to pragmatic decision-making and traditional concerns of national interest.24

Scholars of all three schools of thought penned their works while the Cold War still raged, which was, in and of itself, an unusual situation for historians. Instead of acting as critical commentators with some degree of distance, they became part of the conflict they analyzed. Lacking access to sources, many of their histories of American foreign policy became impassioned and at times speculative, causing them to pay attention to distinctive events while ignoring ideas of culture and historical consciousness.25 This lack of attention paid to the impact of ideas in diplomatic history had serious consequences for Cold War studies. In essence, scholars were especially interested in, and became more adept at, answering testable questions like, “Why the Marshall Plan?” , “Why did the Korean War break out?”, “Why did the world come so close to nuclear war during the Cuban Missile Crisis?, and “Why did both sides pursue détente?” They were far less convincing, however, when attempting to answer general questions such as “Why did the Cold War begin?,” “Why did America act in the manner


25 Among the prime examples of polemical histories from this era are William Appleman Williams, Empire as a Way of Life: An Essay on the Causes and Character of America’s Present Predicament along with a few Thoughts about an Alternative (New York, Oxford University Press, 1980); Howard Zinn, A People’s History of the United States (Harper & Row, 1980).
it did throughout the conflict?,” or as Anders Stephanson teasingly asks, “if the Cold War was a “specifically American project?”

Because all three schools of thought came to view ideology as peripheral, these scholars tended to view ideas as inconsequential elements in the minds of policymakers, rather than as articles of actual belief. Scholars of all three schools of thought tended to treat ideas casually, as mere artifacts that period actors removed from the shelf, dusted off, and applied to any intellectual argument only to be un-problematically returned once they had served their purpose. In effect, rhetoric was largely treated as empty or insignificant. This instrumental view of ideas as mere means “to strategic ends”, an argument that continues to dominate much scholarship on U.S. foreign relations, misses the important question of why American policymakers “deployed the particular language they did and how they came to ‘inhabit’ it.” Removing ideas from the determination of foreign policymaking caused scholars to arrive at what Joan Hoff-Wilson – in a different context – pithily referred to as “the tempting, yet highly questionable assumption, that foreign-policy formulation is a completely rational, calculated process.”

It is the belief that this rationally calculated process is the underpinning of U.S. foreign policy that causes so many scholars to employ weaker substitute concepts like “mindset,” “ethos,” “Weltanschauung,” “global outlook,” “credo,” “political philosophy,” or simply “liberalism” when describing what guides America’s global role. None of these terms, however, resolves the dilemma of the relationship between ideas

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26 Diplomatic historians’ inability to answer – or unwillingness to engage – more general questions was also part of Maier’s original critique. See Maier, “Marking Time,” pp. 376-377. Also, Anders Stephanson, “Liberty or Death: The Cold War as US Ideology” in. Reviewing the Cold War, ed. Westad, pp. 81-100.

and policy initiatives. Instead, they sterilize the debate by disregarding the influences that culture, beliefs, values, language, national habits, and symbols have on foreign policy. Their assumption that interests exist either in virtual isolation from ideas or – even more dubiously – that interests are neutral concepts that exist unchanging over time and can be easily isolated and defined is fundamentally unconvincing. Absent an examination of who decides what our national interests are and the factors – historical and cultural consciousness included– that influence policymakers’ definitions of these interests, any explanation of the larger shifts in U.S. foreign policy over time becomes largely untenable.\(^28\)

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Greater attention paid to the theology and teleology that have undergirded American thought on foreign policy on the long axis will help to clarify more clearly Americans’ self-perceived place in the world and the idea that theirs’ is the indispensable nation. In this context, the period of the early Republic can very much be seen as an era of ideological self-definition. It gave birth to the earlier mentioned nationalistic consciousness that caused – and continues to cause – Americans to define themselves vis-à-vis the rest of the world.

No book, pamphlet, article, or speech announced this birth of American exceptionalist ideology with greater power and conviction than Thomas Paine’s widely read *Common Sense*. Today Paine’s work is largely remembered as fuel on the revolutionary bonfire that inspired the Declaration of Independence. In clear prose and

with acute clarity he denounced King George as a tyrant, demanded social justice, and declared the birth of a new world at hand. But *Common Sense* was far more than a cry for the colonists to cast off the shackles of the British crown. In decisively universalist terms it also called for the promotion of world peace, the overthrow of tyrants, the abolition of secret alliances, and an end to the state dominated European balance-of-power system and its ties to monarchial rule. ²⁹ Here and in later works and correspondence Paine elaborated on these internationalist ideas. While highlighting the new American ideals of freedom, he added a call for the creation of an intercontinental federation and freer commerce to bring prosperity to mankind everywhere. Paine desired to reform not only the New World, but the Old one as well. It was no surprise that the French revolutionaries a decade or so later, so enthusiastically embraced Paine’s ideas of liberty, freedom, and his outcry against tyrannical monarchism. Like Thomas Jefferson, Paine believed “that all men were born equal and that only the environment working on their senses made them different.” Two hundred years later, this vision would go on to foster the core of twentieth century American modernization theory. While Paine was not the only founding father to speak in such decisively internationalist and moralistic terms, his style of incendiary crudeness, sincerity, and judgmental definitions of right and wrong and good and evil delivered a comprehensively populist message that over time has deeply penetrated and influenced the American psyche and its missionary spirit. Philosophically and ideologically, the new nation he helped found defined itself not by its

borders, but by its values, not by its geographical location or isolation, but by the global applicability of its ideas.\textsuperscript{30}

This perception of national greatness that gripped the revolutionary generation and the sense of global responsibility that Paine characterized became deeply engrained in American thought throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century. During this period, the perception of America as the new Israel, the vanguard of global harmonization, and the promoter of political and human progress matured and began to shape a vision of the United States’ role in the world. This vision first found its voice and its path in support for democratic ideals overseas and in manifest destiny’s spread across the North American continent. Once strong enough, it was inevitable that a country considering itself the bearer of such righteous ideals would seek to actively export them as well. “If Americans didn’t bring the world up to their own standard, the world would bring Americans down to its.”\textsuperscript{31} Beliefs of this nature continue to heavily influence and justify foreign policies undertaken in the promotion of American ideas and core values.

Like faith, the core values of American ideology fuel agency. They convince Americans that their nation is unlike any other. Understanding how this historical and cultural consciousness shapes America’s values is fundamental to our understanding of how policies, domestic and foreign, develop over time. Policy, after all, is never executed in a vacuum. It is not autonomous or separable from social, cultural, and

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historical settings. Exceptionalism in U.S. foreign policy is an elastic concept that deeply penetrates American society, and, as such, it acts more like a religion than a political idea. It is a reflection of national cultural systems and of national beliefs. Geertz accurately defined culture and cultural consciousness as active perceptions of collective beliefs, morals and attitudes that influence behavior and help create “socially established structures of meaning.”32 The conviction that the United States is unique in thought, action, and virtue lies at the heart of these structures of meaning. Understanding culture’s impact on foreign policy requires attention to these definable beliefs and values, to collective and social experiences, to national psychological patterns, and to the evolution of national legacies. In this context, ideology is not about Shils’ rigid perception of ideas as irrational or intellectually dishonest, but, rather, is about lived historical experiences. It is about how these experiences are embodied in ideas, memories, traditions, value-systems and institutional forms; it is about how these experiences influence action and thought for the individual and for the collective. For Americans these structures of meaning buttress a determined belief that their ideals are transferable to others.

Nowhere is the power of these societal structures more prominently exhibited than in the special relationship Americans have with their founding fathers. No other liberal democracy honors its past generations or pays homage to its nation’s inception the way that the United States does. Americans need to know that they follow the path envisioned by Washington, Jefferson, Franklin, Madison, and the pantheon of demi-gods

that drew the nation’s roadmap. The righteous qualities of the first generation help pit Americans against other nations and forms of government; it makes their nation the flag bearer of a freedom that the world cannot hope to achieve on its own. For most Americans, the question has only been about how the role of flag bearer should be executed. Not if it should be. As historian H.W. Brands succinctly argues, the only question has been whether Americans should remain the “example” of freedom or the “vindicator” of it. This perception of America as the depository of freedom is vital to American exceptionalism. Within the framework of American ideology this reality also inspires a unique view of threats and enemies. It ensures that “any threat is viewed as one of enslavement and is against the basic principles of humankind. Any conflict, consequently, tends to become a question of antagonistic ‘ways of life’.” Only men and women of faith, religious or ideological, think in this way. This is also what separates the American missionary role from the French mission civilisatrice or the British equivalent of their empire as a civilizing entity. Although both England and France envisioned a particular responsibility in their colonies, theirs’ was far less global and did not by definition view contrary ideas as inherently threatening to their role in the world the way Americans do.

33 As Gordon Woods has explained it, “America’s Founding Fathers have a special significance for the American public. People want to know what Thomas Jefferson would think of affirmative action, or how George Washington would regard the invasion of Iraq. No other major nation honors its historical characters in quite the way we do. The British don’t have to check in periodically with, say, either of the two William Pitts to find out what a historical figure of two centuries ago might think of David Cameron’s government in the way we seem to have to check in with Jefferson or Washington about our current policies and predicaments. Americans seem to have a special need for these authentic historical figures in the here and now.” See Wood, “No Thanks for the Memories,” The New York Review of Books, January 13, 2011.

Originally expressed in Americans’ fear of the papacy and then later in the eighteenth century in its fear of London, these perceptions brought to fruition the – in itself very ideological – fear of things anti-American and un-American. It is this fear that puts the United States on a collision course with opposing powers that possess similar idea-based ambitions. This fear only intensified during the Cold War; but its roots went far deeper. In the eighteenth and nineteenth century, it was captured in Patrick Henry’s cry of “give me liberty or give me death,” in John Quincy Adams’ insistence that America has “uniformly spoken among [the nations], though often to heedless and often to disdainful ears, the language of equal liberty, of equal justice, and of equal rights,” and in Abraham Lincoln’s proclamation of America “as the world’s last best hope.” In the twentieth century, it was embraced by Woodrow Wilson’s idealistic Fourteen Points, by Henry Luce’s call for the American century, and by Harry Truman’s doctrinaire argument that the United States must commit itself to defend free nations everywhere. Essentially, world peace, Americans came to believe, rested U.S. shoulders. This theme was revisited in NSC-68’s assertion that the world was divided not only between good and evil, but between the godless and the God-fearing, and it was pronounced in Ronald Reagan’s edict that the “years ahead will be great ones for our country, for the cause of freedom and the spread of civilization.” President George W. Bush revealed the immortality of these convictions in the present century when he declared that across “generations we have proclaimed the imperative of self-government, because no one is fit to be a master, and no one deserves to be a slave. Advancing these ideals is the mission
that created our Nation. It is the honorable achievement of our fathers. Now it is the time urgent requirement of our nation’s security and the calling of our time.”35

As evidenced from the quotations above, wars have often fertilized potent beliefs of American global responsibility. The impact of the American Civil War, the Great War, and the Second World War in particular, caused Americans to conceptualize, and desire to influence, the shape of the world order. The present war on international terrorism has done the same. However, it would be too simplistic to imply that the misery of war serves as the exclusive catalyst for American exceptionalism. There is a comprehensive and powerfully symbolic legacy (the origins and heritage to which I return to with greater detail in chapter two) that goes far deeper than the agony caused by military conflict. It is a legacy of the one honorable nation that believes itself capable of, and destined to ensure, the approximation of a good society in the world.

In this context, ideas expressed through language become crucial. In matters of ideology – as in matters of faith – attention to the meaning of rhetoric and the pervasiveness of particular kinds of rhetoric sharpens our interpretation of ideas and how they function politically and socially. Emphasis on the role of symbols, metaphors, and logic in shaping the ideological nature of speeches, correspondence, national security memoranda, journals, diaries, interviews, press conferences, and media articles adds an additional methodological layer to the interpretation of American foreign policy. Such an emphasis forces us to ask questions of what this American exceptionalist ideology is and what it does. It helps us counter the “commonplace but misguided view frequently entertained by American commentators that others have ideology while pragmatic Americans follow self-evident truths.”

This emphasis on ideas as policy catalysts and on the intellectual interpretative value of language was most famously dismissed by the progressive historians of the early twentieth century. Charles Beard and Carl Becker, for example, casually rejected ideas and rhetoric as nothing more than tactical posturing; they viewed them as political rather than cultural. Visions of American greatness, Beard believed, were not visions of the people or for the people but were the elite’s attempt to garner public support through

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37 Hunt, Ideology and U.S. Foreign Policy, p. 200.
The nature of the American system, he insisted, simply demanded hyperbole.\textsuperscript{38} Although Beard’s final point has merit, his view of ideology misses the point. Despite its clearly ideological overtones, the language of American greatness is not the language of manipulation. It is not simplistically shaped by charismatic leaders or by the intelligentsia’s manifestos; it resonates with the American people as a powerful agent for a reason. The perception that the central role played by ideology is to provide the political elite with a repertoire of manipulative devices to seduce its consumers heavily underplays the American public’s willingness to embrace these ideas. I do not mean to suggest that perfect harmony exits between America’s political leaders and the public. My aim is not to reduce “discourse to one stable system of meaning...[but to] show how political language” is being used to build a sense of community around idealistic perceptions that \textit{already exist}.\textsuperscript{39} This contextualization of high intellectual and political life, including a greater emphasis on the relationship between the elite and the common citizen, has been one of the cultural historians’ many contributions to the study of history over the past three decades. As Gordon Wood points out, much of this research demonstrates that American intellectuals too “were expressing ideas that grew out of and had great resonance in the culture of their time and place.” Ideology, in other words, is


not mere propaganda. Political ideas and political language mean only what politicians can convince the public to believe.\textsuperscript{40}

Even if American ideology at times serves propagandistically, this does not \textit{a priori} rule out that it is also serves as a component in the actual determination of policy ambitions and public beliefs. American exceptionalist ideology is not simply directed \textit{at} the American public. It is \textit{of} the American public. It is not a rigid tool wielded by the state. It is not dictated. To understand its importance and how it functions, we need to consider how it manifests itself in society in specific moments in time as well as over time. It is part of a collective experience and a nationally engrained learning process that defines what it means to be an American. Symbiotically, it acts both as a creation in the national psyche and as an idea unconsciously consumed in society. Its convictions infuse and influence American society from school text books to the arts, to culture and religion. It permeates much of the American media, America’s admiration for the U.S. military – which, more than any other military in the world, is spoken of as the guarantor of freedom and peace – and of course the political arena. It is evident in routine symbols, habits, shared rituals like the pledge of allegiance, and in expressions of national pride.

It is this national consciousness that forms the core of the ideas, thoughts, convictions, and the cultural milieu that American politicians bring with them into office. Like all citizens, these policymakers’ lives are formed by socialization. Regardless of what progressive historians inferred, ascension to high office hardly immunizes men and women from these legacies. The baggage that accompanies politicians to positions of

\textsuperscript{40}Wood, \textit{The Idea of America}, pp. 15-16.
power creates, nurtures, and sustains a national identity that consistently, and with tremendous popular support, highlights a world in need of American redemption. This guides and informs politicians in their responses to both the domestic and the international environment. As a result, politicians shape a set of values that Americans believe in for their own sake and often independently of any prospects of success. American exceptionalist ideology, therefore produces - and is a product of – both cultural and historical consciousness.\textsuperscript{41}

None of this is to say that there is not a history of opposition to visions of an idealistic American foreign policy. However, American dissent has traditionally proven short lived and comparatively weak. Jane Addams, Samuel Clemens, William Jennings, Bryan, Robert LaFollette, the young Bob LaFollette, Jr., Eugene Debs, Harry Elmer Barnes, Randolph Bourne, Jeanette Rankin, Henry Wallace, Wayne Morse, Ernest Gruening, Pat Buchanan and many more have all played the virtuous role of the dissenting voice. Their very opposition to the establishment’s desire for commitments overseas made them potent representations of democratic values. Yet, on the long axis, their influence has been practically nil. Even when opposition has risen to a quasi-powerful status, it has always proven temporary. The dismay brought about by the Philippine Insurrection, the Great War, and later the Vietnam War bruised the American will and its belief in American exceptionalism. But not for long.\textsuperscript{42} While recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and a domestic economic crisis may have caused Americans to


\textsuperscript{42}For an extensive coverage of American dissent against the United States’ foreign policy, see David A. Mayers, Dissenting Voices in America’s Rise to Power (Cambridge University Press, 2007).
once again pause and question their own can-do ability, it would be ahistorical, if not naïve, to believe in the permanency of this apprehension. American perceptions of the United States’ missionary role in the world and the belief in American capabilities are simply too strong to allow such apprehension to overthrow century-worn ideas. Culturally, they run too deep. Far more research is needed on the sociology of ideology, but such research may well prove that ideology in fact serves more effectively in the United States than elsewhere. It may well show that ideology – like any faith – is “most potent not when it is formally defined, but when it is so widely accepted that it can be left largely tacit and easily invoked.” It may well show that this belief in a distinct American greatness is so omnipresent in America’s culture that politicians can largely “chart a course by them” without any widespread opposition from the national gallery of citizens and intellectuals.  

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Becoming comfortable with the existence and depth of this American exceptionalist ideology is vital if we are to fully grasp America’s role in the world. The far more multifaceted manner in which history is now studied appears, in any case, to lead toward analytical diversity and away from a “school of thought” concentration. This raises genuine doubts about the possibility of exclusive interpretations of U.S. foreign policy. As Odd Arne Westad insisted, the diplomatic historian’s task now seems to be “to find ways to describe, in looking at a long axis of analysis, points that seem particularly promising for further scholarly inquiry, based on a combination of work already

*Hunt,* Ideology and U.S. Foreign Policy, p. 200.
undertaken and the availability of sources." No new research is needed to demonstrate the extent of ideology. There are no archives where the influence of ideology can be specifically detected. What is needed is a new perspective on the facts and information already available. Diplomatic historians need to read sources ideologically. This means paying particular attention to language, the cultural and historical legacies, as described above, and the extent to which these come together to make up an American national self-perception. This will help us clarify how and why Americans during the Cold War—and since—both consciously and unconsciously and with no evident interest in the facts on the ground, often allowed their preconceptions to dictate foreign policy.

So far, only a handful of scholars have seriously ventured down this path. Among these, the works cited above by Michael Hunt, Anders Stephanson, and particularly Odd Arne Westad have highlighted how ideology increases our understanding of what makes the United States tick. Of the three, Westad’s works have concentrated most intensely on the Cold War; however, all three have emphasized that diplomatic historians hobbled by historical consciousness have been too twentieth century focused and consequently have failed to understand American foreign policy as a result of deeper cultural and social systems, structures, and beliefs. I share these scholars’ conviction that ideology is

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45 Another excellent example of a work that analyzes foreign policy as a history of ideas is Mead’s, Special Providence: American Foreign Policy and how it Changed the World. In recent years, several historians and political scientists have brought the issue of ideas to the center of their analyses of U.S. foreign relations. While much valuable research has come from these volumes, most of them, engage U.S. foreign policy in broad terms, often discussing each presidency in only a single chapter. Although there is much to applaud about this method, its demonstration of the sustainability of particular influences and perceptions inevitably leads to works of a generalizing nature. As examples, see Tony Smith, America’s Mission: The United States and the Worldwide Struggle for Democracy in the Twentieth Century (Princeton, 1994); Frank Ninkovich, The Wilsonian Century: U.S. Foreign Policy Since 1900 (Chicago, 1999).
always a component in political action. I do not, however, believe that it guides policy autonomously. There is no absolute standard for understanding American foreign policy. No methodology serves as its catchall. However, even if no singular analytical framework has a monopoly on our understanding of historical events, attention to a theory of ideology will allow for more nuanced conclusions. It will allow for a complementary – not a contradictory – methodological framework to much of the current scholarship referenced in the pages above. Nevertheless, there is little doubt that emphasis on ideology will meet resistance from diplomatic historians. They generally doubt its heuristic value. Having witnessed the violence done to the complexity of historical reality by political scientists’ and international relations theorists’ intense over-theorization and compartmentalization of foreign relations into synthetic ideas of systems, state models, and structures, while ignoring individual actors, diplomatic historians worry about anchoring historical explanations of policy in specific social, political, or cultural conditions. In essence, they are concerned about reductionism. However, their general 

*apriori* rejection of ideology is both unconvincing and surprising. If anything, wholesale dismissal of theoretical concepts, including ideology, is not practical nor even possible. Ideology’s relevance

rests on a simple preposition of fundamental importance. To move in a world of infinite complexity, individuals and societies need to reduce that world to finite terms. Only then can they pretend an understanding of their environment and have the confidence to talk about it and the courage to act on it. Policy making, like any other individual or collective activity, requires that simplifying clarity. Policy makers get their keys to ‘reality’ in the same ways that others in their culture do. Policy makers are formed by a socialization that begins in childhood and continues even as they try and retain those keys or discard them as a result of experience in making decisions.
The point is that any attempt to understand social and political realities over time involves intentionally abstracting from the mass of events at least some uniformities for special consideration.\textsuperscript{46} Intellectually, it is not possible to move in a world of unbounded complexity. That is why we label individuals as “Christians,” “Muslims,” “liberals,” “conservatives,” “rational consumers,” “Marxists,” “fascists,” “capitalists,” “terrorists,” “Democrats,” “Republicans,” and so on, as if these headings aptly clarify the opinions or convictions of entire socio-cultural groups. Decoding, classifying, and interpreting complex products of national culture into a coherent system of ideas requires some degree of generalization. Such is the occupational hazard of theorizing. However, if done cautiously, it can illuminate and clarify rather than obscure.

The central point, then, is not whether American exceptionalism is true or not, but what kind of emotions, language, and, ultimately, policies it inspires. Ever since the war in Vietnam, it has been fashionable to dismiss American exceptionalism as a myth, to reject the idea, that the United States is inherently better than, or superior to, other nations.\textsuperscript{47} While true in and of itself, this rejection of American exceptionalism misses the point. It has no more value than asking if Christianity is true or real. In the final analysis, ideology, like religion, is not about verifiable truth. It matters not at all if American exceptionalism is real or imagined. It matters only what people believe. The central point then becomes, to paraphrase the anthropological structuralist Levi Strauss,

\textsuperscript{46} Hunt, “Ideology,” in Hogan and Paterson eds., p. 221.
not how or if Americans think in myths, but how myths operate in the American mind. In this context, believers in American exceptionalism are not necessarily any more or less united in their global or cultural outlook than Christians or Muslims. However, that does not mean that the depth of beliefs in fundamental concepts or values systematically expressed in language or cultural symbols by large groups of individuals can be marginalized. To understand how this American exceptionalism functions in foreign policy, the central question historians need to ask is not if politicians subscribe to an ideology, but what “this ideology means and, more importantly, what kind of difference it makes in shaping…intentions, policies, and behaviors.”

These broad observations on ideology should inspire scholars to place greater emphasis on the importance of the core ideas and values that helped shape U.S. Cold War foreign policy. Integrating ideology into our understanding of the conduct of American actions around the world adds an important dimension to our perception of how foreign policy outlooks emerged, changed, and ultimately influenced this nation’s policies. This approach allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the preconceived notions Americans possessed as the Cold War began. American fears about the Soviet Union went far deeper than the immediate threat posed by Moscow’s potential military might.

Although I do not believe that historical and cultural perceptions of American exceptionalism and primacy caused the Cold War, I agree with Stephanson that the impact of these ideas on national self-perception made the conflict a distinctively American one, one fought on American terms. Joseph M. Jones, one of the architects of

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48 Hunt, “Ideology” in Hogan and Paterson eds., p. 222.
the European Recovery Program, may have been right when he insisted that the mid-
1940s represented an era when U.S. policy changed for the better and accomplished
extraordinary deeds.49 But if the policies were new, the ideas behind them emphatically
were not. The Cold War epitomized ideas of greatness long in the making. It was the
universalist challenge posed by the Soviet Union that made the United States perceive it
as a threat. By the nineteen sixties, the Soviet nuclear fleet did, of course, come to
constitute a credible existential threat to the United States, but by then the dice were
already cast. By then, the war of ideology was well underway. The Cold War did not –
pace Robert Kagan’s commentary on the impact of September 11 – change Americans;
the Cold War made Americans more themselves. How this happened, why it happened,
and what the significance of it was, is fundamental to understanding the international role
the United States took upon itself as the Second World War came to a close. But before
we can define how Harry Truman set out to define and defend this post-war order as
president, we need first to trace in more detail the origins and the development of the
American exceptionalist ideology as the nation rose from the Early Republic to the role
of victor in the Second World War. We must illustrate how this development defined and
calibrated an American identity and the role of the United States in the world.

Between the Revolutionary War and the defeat of fascism at the end of the Second World War, American exceptionalism contributed powerfully to the evolution of the United States as an ideological entity. Interpretations of international developments over the course of this period, made it evident to each generation of Americans that their nation was qualitatively different from others. Their republican New World appeared more egalitarian, just, and righteous when compared to the monarchial and often undemocratic Old World. As the country matured, the perception that this new nation was indispensable to the future of democracy evolved from an idea in the minds of men to something most Americans considered an undeniable reality.

Americans have always debated what responsibilities accompanied this special status. Is it enough for America to remain an example of civic and democratic society, to light the world and let others draw inspiration from the obvious advantages of freedom? Should the United States, as John Quincy Adams insisted, abstain from seeking out “monsters to destroy?” Or do the virtues of their experiment require Americans to carry on active measures in the name of righteousness and liberty for mankind? Should they, as Woodrow Wilson insisted, actively seek to “make the world safe for democracy?” Intellectuals, politicians, and the national gallery of citizens have over time come down on either side of this dilemma. But they have rarely disagreed that it would be in
America’s and the world’s best interest for other regions and nations to adhere to the ideals, principles, and virtues inherent in the United States.¹

This vision of American exceptionalism is by definition comparative. Thus an integral component of its ideology concerns itself with how Americans perceive their nation and their institutions, and, in contrast, how they view the lack of political and social opportunities and the lack of liberal maturity in other countries. This interplay between self-reflection and judgment of others has generated tremendous inspirational and moral energy in American foreign policy. Over time it helped shape a national identity that when “infused with Protestant millennialism…gave Americans the sense that they were chosen people of God, possessing peculiar qualities of virtue, with a special responsibility to lead the world toward liberty and republican government.”² In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the political ideas and behaviors that laid the foundation for this belief were given coherence by classical republican civic and humanistic traditions. Links between the ancient and the new republican worlds were popularly reflected in early schoolbooks. As the historian Henry Steele Commager explained it, “[G]eographies spoke with contempt of the peoples of the East and with pity of those of the Old World. Histories dismissed ten centuries of Europe as the Dark Ages. Greece and Rome furnished heroes to compare with Washington, but no modern nation

¹ For two excellent discussions on this dilemma’s influence of U.S. foreign policy over time, see, H.W. Brands, *What America Owes the World*; Walter McDougall, *Promised Land, Crusader State.*
“...did so.” This national narrative defined the New World as the only heir of the ancient traditions of justice and virtue.³

Eventually this vision of national greatness would inspire Henry Luce’s prophecy of an American century shortly before the U.S. became a belligerent in the Second World War, but the conviction that theirs was a superior nation with infinite possibilities and global obligations had roots all the way back to the nation’s founding.⁴ From politicians to poets, the view that only Americans could save the world from itself has proved overwhelmingly persistent. In his first inaugural address, Thomas Jefferson called the nation “the world’s best hope,” while half a century later Walt Whitman pondered in *Pioneers Oh Pioneers!*, “Have the elder races halted? Do they droop and end their lesson, weared over there beyond the seas?” Answering in the affirmative, Whitman insisted that it rested on the American to “take up the task eternal.”⁵

Regardless of the hardships caused by economic crises, sectional strife, or Civil War or the occasional voices of dissent from pacifists, socialists, and others, the nineteenth century American “cherished an uncritical and unquestioning conviction that his was the best of all countries, and every emigrant who crossed the Atlantic westward – few went the other way – confirmed him in his assumption that this fact was everywhere

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⁴ Henry R. Luce, “The American Century.”
acknowledged.” The enduring manifestation of this exceptionalism and the ease with which politicians have remained able to resurrect and cultivate this conviction in the American mind makes it ideological in nature. For more than two centuries, this conviction has fostered a national vision of the United States as the depository and promoter of global freedom. This idea was evident in Americans’ response to late eighteenth and nineteenth century revolutions around the world, in the root ideals of Manifest Destiny, and in the legacy left by the Civil War. This exceptionalist ideology also dominated the progressivist views of the 1890s, which the contemporary generation pressed on the world order and at home. All the way up to the Second World War, Americans viewed others as falling short of the standards set by their New World. Time cements not only nations, but often ideas as well.

The foundation of a unique New World is often attributed to John Winthrop and the Puritans who founded the Massachusetts Bay Colony. In his 1630 sermon, *A Model of Christian Charity*, Winthrop famously declared that the Puritans’ mission following their exodus from Europe, was to create a New World that would shine “like a city on a hill” for all to see. Winthrop of course was not in the New World by choice; he was only there because he and his associates were not strong enough to force their ideals on others back in England. The Puritan mission, in fact, was not one of equality or freedom, something Winthrop made demonstratively clear during his governorship in Massachusetts. It did

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6 Commager, *The American Mind*, p. 11.
not inspire republican societal ideas of liberty and virtue. Escaping persecution does not by default create advocates of freedom. As such John Winthrop is a poor ambassador for American ideals. If he deserves a seat among the founders of American ideas it is not because of what he did or aspired to do in the New World, but because of his insistence that a covenant existed between God and the new arrivals to America. This instilled the myth of choseness in the American mind; a vision that has powerfully influenced American national self-perception and visions of global responsibility ever since.

The ideologization of American political thought belongs not with Winthrop but with the eighteenth century patriots who challenged the colonial policies of the British Empire. Their generation created the intellectual and spiritual structures and beliefs that reformed the relationship between rulers and citizens, reshaped the social orders, and led to the creation of the United States. They reconstituted what power and liberty meant for a society. As Gordon Wood insists, this made Americans “an ideological people.” The American conception of the nation as “the leader of the world began in 1776…The revolutionaries believed themselves to be in the vanguard of history.” It was this ideological legacy, more so than the collapse of British dominance in North America, that on the long axis made the American Revolution a universal event.

The creation of this ideological legacy was not the work of one person. Across the New World, inspirational orators, pamphleteers, politicians, and citizens called for rectifying not only the evils of British control, but the evils of modern societies as well. This radicalism was deeply embedded in America’s “first public intellectual,” Thomas

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Paine. He has never been given his due as one of the inspirations of American foreign policy; except among scholars of colonial America, he remains mainly forgotten. But if we want to understand America and the nation’s role in the world over time, we need to acknowledge that the eighteenth century, in John Adams’ words, was “the age of Paine.”

*Common Sense, Rights of Man,* and *The Age of Reason* are not only three of the most piercing portrayals of the rise of liberalism, they are vital examples of America’s ideological mission. Even if he rarely gets the credit, it was Paine’s emphasis on the spread of American freedoms, and on liberalism that inspired not only his generation, but generations since. Whether American politicians and scholars of foreign policy are conscious of it or not, since the publication of *Rights of Man* in 1792, anyone who has attempted to design U.S. foreign policy “has been able to provide little more than an echo of Paine’s original philippic.”

Paine’s prolific writings championed republican revolutions and moral justice not just for Americans, but for all of mankind. He insisted that “[I]f universal peace, civilization, and commerce are ever to be the happy lot of man, it cannot be accomplished but by a revolution in the system of governments.” He called for the proliferation of freedom, for the Americanization of the world, and for the abolition of monarchies everywhere. This eighteenth century defiance of the Royal houses was as natural as the

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11 As Gordon Wood makes clear, for the “term ‘republicanism’ we today have to substitute the word ‘democracy’ or we won’t understand what was meant in the eighteenth century. After all, the Chinese today live in a republic, as do the Syrians and the Cubans.” See, Wood, *The Idea of America*, pp. 320-335 (quotation on p. 322).
American challenge to communism would be in the twentieth. Just as communism would be viewed as antithetical to American ideals, so monarchies embodied the fundamental challenge of Paine’s century to a republican world. Every attack he launched on the ambitions of kings and on non-democratic governments ended with the certainty of man throwing off his shackles. “There is a morning of reason rising upon man on the subject of government, that has not appeared before. As the barbarism of the present old governments expires, the moral conditions of nations with respect to each other will be changed.” 12 Paine envisioned progress toward a union of nations. International cooperation toward a league for peace would surge, he believed, on the ideas that were flowing from the rising democracies in America and, after 1789, France. This was not an argument for American power, profit, or imperialism, but about a way of life.

Like later generations of Americans, Paine drew on providentialism and enlightenment theories, prophesizing that a society of free men would, through reason, reveal the design of providence. The U.S. was the model and the inspirer for human progress, but Paine never believed that the American Revolution was enough for humankind. He hailed events in France, because they confirmed the American revolutionary project. Together, the emerging democracies would establish principles of freedom that would spread from one country to the next. In reverse, American statesmen two centuries later would warn against a similar dissemination of ideology – this time international communism – through a process they dubbed the domino effect. However,

in the 1790s, it was Americans who championed the spread of their ideology, believing that its ideas of democracy and liberty would spread like dominoes across the world. “An army of principles will penetrate where an army of soldiers cannot; it will succeed where diplomatic management would fail; it is neither the Rhine, the Channel, nor the ocean that can arrest its progress; it will march on the horizon of the world, and it will conquer,” Paine asserted. It is not hard to imagine those words spoken in Russian in Petrograd in 1917 and the image of Lenin shaking his fist in the cause of the communist revolution. It was similar in manner, logic, and vision. But in 1793, this was America’s ideological prophecy.

Thomas Jefferson concurred with Paine’s call for a “universal society, whose mind rises above the atmosphere of local thought and considers mankind of whatever nation.” The Declaration of Independence, which Jefferson later described as “an expression of the American mind,” outlined rights not only for Americans, but for all men. Centering on the contradictions of justice and tyranny, the document that made America spoke of the right to overthrow not only the British government, but any government that was destructive to its people’s welfare. Jefferson both rationalized the specific act of American independence and sought to inspire future conduct across the world. The New World he helped create was not geographically restricted to the Americas; rather, it represented the start of a novus ordo seclorum.

The French Revolution, the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizens, and the new French constitution seemed to confirm that this new global order was at hand. Like the American Revolution, the universality of French ideals posed a challenge to every political system. Americans cheered the announcement of the French republic, sang French revolutionary songs, and began wearing *les tricolores*. France bestowed honorary citizenship on Washington, Paine, Hamilton, and Madison. To a friend, Jefferson insisted that this “ball of liberty…is now so well in motion that it will roll round the globe... for light & liberty go together. It is our glory that we first put it into motion.” The Federalist, John Marshall, believed “human liberty to depend in a great measure on the success of the French Revolution.” James Monroe agreed. He shrugged at the execution of Louis XVI as an incident on the “path to a much greater cause,” just as Jefferson anticipated that the tree of liberty occasionally had to be watered with the blood of tyrants. But as violence gripped France, Paine began fearing that it would slow the universalist cause. From Paris, he wrote despondently to Jefferson that if the French revolution had lived up to its principles it could have extended “liberty throughout the greatest part of Europe.” In the absence of that he feared that the “great object of European liberty...[would be] limited to France only”, Paine wrote to Georges Jacques Danton that France’s failure to pay attention to moral principles – unlike in the United States – had injured the character of the revolution and “discouraged the progress of liberty all over the world.”

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16 Paine to Jefferson, April 20, 1793, in *Complete Writings of Thomas Paine* vol. 2, pp. 1335-1337; Paine to Georges J. Danton, May 6, 1793, Ibid. p. 1331.
Because Paine and Jefferson pushed the revolutionary cause with more fervor than did Alexander Hamilton and John Adams, many scholars distinguish between Republican and Federalist foreign policy visions in the 1790s. Certainly there were serious disagreements between the two sides, particularly concerning Jay’s Treaty but these were largely tactical. In the context of American exceptionalist ideology, what is significant is, as Philipp Ziesche points out in a recent study, that even if Republicans accepted the violence in France with greater ease than did Federalists, both held equally universalist beliefs. At the end of the Constitutional convention in 1787, for example, Federalists championed the Constitution as an “inspirational instrument to the Old World” that was destined to demonstrate to the European powers the superiority and desirability of America’s republican model of governance. Both parties saw the Old World as rotten and their own as the path to man’s progress and prosperity.17 The principal disagreement among Americans going forward rested not on questions concerning the virtues of their system of governance or its global appeal to all nations, but rather on the methods with which such a system could be afforded to the world.

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“The free system of government we have established is so congenial with reason, with common sense, and with a universal feeling, that it must produce approbation and a desire of imitation, James Madison insisted.”18 So it did. Inspired by the achievements in

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North America, nationalist movements in Europe, Latin America, and elsewhere sought to replicate Americans’ success. It was understandable, as John Quincy Adams wrote a friend, that the nations of the Old World, ripe with tension in 1817, should see the United States as a potentially “dangerous member of the society of nations.”

During the first three decades of the nineteenth century, Latin American independence movements seized on the weakness of Spain’s colonial empire. The initiative inspired men like Henry Clay who asserted that South America was “fighting for liberty and independence – for precisely what we fought for.” He introduced legislation to recognize the new Republics, hoping to provide them with the same boost French recognition had afforded the U.S. in 1778. Though diplomatic recognition only followed belatedly, the U.S. set a precedent of being the first to recognize new republican governments, establishing important principles of opposition to tyranny and imperialism. This moral support, however, did not lead to armed support of revolutionaries. In part because President James Monroe and John Quincy Adams, now Secretary of State, feared that excessive interference might draw the United States into a war with the far stronger European powers but also because many including Adams believed being an exemplar for the world was America’s primary purpose. The violence in France also tempered American support for instant republican revolutions in Latin

America as did the horrific stories of bloodshed Americans learned of from concurrent events in Haiti where a slave rebellion inspired the island’s independence from France in the early nineteenth century. Stories of Haitian murders of whites, cannibalism, infanticide, and rape not only scared Americans – particularly Southern slaveholders, – it served as an early, an often since repeated, warning to Americans of the impact of freedom in the hands of people unfit to guard it. As historian Ashli White recently explained it, the violence “particularized the rebellion” in Haiti.21 It only served to highlight the exceptional nature of the American Revolution.

The absence in Latin America of the unique combination of education and geographical space that had provided exceptional circumstances to the colonists in North America as well as widespread racism and anti-Catholicism did little to convince the U.S. that the Latin Americans were ready for liberty. John Quincy Adams was certain, for example, that they “have not the first elements of good or free government. Arbitrary power, military and ecclesiastical, was stamped upon their education upon their habits, and upon all their institutions.” Although not quite as rancorous, Jefferson concurred. To John Adams, the Secretary of State’s father, he wrote that he did not believe them “yet sufficiently enlightened for self-government,” but he remained confident that Latin American nations would become “sufficiently trained by education and habits of freedom

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to walk safely by themselves.” In essence, once circumstances were favorable, republicanism would follow.²²

Despite concerns about events in France, Americans still deemed the conditions for liberty more favorable in Europe than in Latin America. As a result they celebrated as Greece, the nation that gave birth to democratic principles, launched its own war for independence from the Ottoman Empire. American citizens shared the *North American Review*’s cry that the Greek patriots must remind the American of the “the great and glorious part”, which his country plays “in the political regeneration of the world… Through France, the influence of our example has been transmitted to the other European states…the leaven of freedom is at work.” American newspapers rallied to the cause, and funds were collected all over the country to support Greece’s American hour. One newspaper reported it impossible to record the many efforts “to procure aid for the Greek cause. It is sufficient to say that the feeling is universal. Meetings are called in every considerable village, and country clergymen are taking up collections to augment the fund.” It would become the first “sustained American venture in overseas philanthropy.” Noah Webster, John Adams, James Madison, General William Henry Harrison, and Henry Clay all strongly backed the Greek cause. So too did Senator Daniel Webster, who in the House of Representatives thundered that what was at stake was freedom’s struggle against absolutism. “Does it not become us,” Webster queried, “is it not a duty imposed upon us, to give our weight to the side of liberty and justice, to let mankind know that we

are not tired of our own institutions, and to protest against the asserted power of altering at pleasure the law of the civilized world?”

As was the case in Latin America, a combination of domestic circumstances and the reality of a weak American military overruled any chance of active American support. The Missouri crisis, the First Seminole War, and ongoing negotiations over the Adams-Onis Treaty with Spain made active American involvement in foreign revolutions impossible and undesirable. All Monroe could manage was his unenforceable 1823 Doctrine that promised American non-intervention in the affairs of Europe and asked that the Europeans provide the U.S. with the same courtesy in the Western Hemisphere. The Monroe Doctrine is commonly viewed as a policy intended to separate the western hemisphere from European affairs along the lines suggested by Washington in his Farewell Address. Monroe’s early draft of his speech, however, reflected nothing of the sort, nor was this the view taken by many members of the cabinet or by James Madison. Monroe wanted to use his address to warn Americans that republicanism was under threat from European powers and the Holy Alliance. He wanted to formally recognize Greece, denounce the Europeans monarchies, and emphasize that Americans did in fact consider events in Europe within its realm of concern. It was only John Quincy Adams who convinced Monroe not to issue this strongly worded ideological statement. This view

carried the day and in the absence of aid to Greece, the Turks crushed the independence movement while autocracy and local violence spread across Latin America.24

This pattern of hope followed by disappointment repeated itself two decades later in 1848, as democratic enthusiasm once again flared across much of Europe. American citizens and politicians hailed the Hungarians, the French, the Germans, and many more as they revolted against monarchies. Once again, Washington was among the first to recognize the new governments in the hope the Old World would finally fulfill America’s dream of European republicanism. What is more, Americans claimed credit. Dismissing the Hapsburg monarchy’s protest of American support for the Hungarian revolutionary, Lajos Kossuth – only the second foreigner after Lafayette to address the U.S. Congress – Daniel Webster, now Secretary of State, made clear “that the prevalence of sentiments favorable to republican liberty is the result of the reaction of America upon Europe; and the source and center of that reaction has doubtless been, and now is, these United States.” During a visit to the U.S., Kossuth met Abraham Lincoln who declared him Europe’s “most worthy and distinguished representative of the cause of civil and religious liberty.”25 Despite this moral support, democracy was not coming to Europe. The European revolutions tapered out and slipped into brutal violence, they were suppressed by monarchical forces everywhere with no stable republican governments

emerging alongside the American model. These failures to establish regimes akin to theirs intensified a myth in the minds of Americans. To preserve their millennial vision, the memory of the American Revolution became a tale of virtuousness, lacking any of the violence on display across the Atlantic. In Americans’ historical and cultural consciousness, national spirit, character, and God’s will were the sources of American freedom. Not even the deep sectional crisis, which intensified just as Europe’s revolutions faltered, could temper these convictions in the American mind.26

Since Americans abstained from military intervention in support of these nineteenth century revolutionaries, many scholars view American commitment to a universalist freedom as half-hearted rhetoric and exceptionalism as mere grandiloquence. They instead define U.S. nineteenth century foreign policy as exemplary realist. This misses the point. To Americans, republicanism was about civic humanism and virtue; it was the character and spirit of the people that made a republic. The conclusion Americans drew, particularly after the failure in France, was that people had to desire republicanism to bring it about. Political and social maturity through education and property were prerequisites to liberty. Americans wanted to export their values and ideals, but also came to believe that when people were ready – and only then – they “would sooner or later become as republican as [the Americans] had...[For now,

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26 For the need to mythologize the American Revolution see, Timothy Mason Roberts, Distant Revolutions: 1848 and the Challenge to American Exceptionalism (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2009); David B. Davis, Revolutions: Reflections on American Equality and Foreign Liberations (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1990).
Americans] could best accomplish their mission of bringing free governments to the world simply by existing as a free government.”

This perception of hierarchy and of different stages of social evolution, the idea that liberty was not immediately attainable for all, fit naturally with Americans’ nineteenth century social perceptions. It was because of these perceptions of hierarchy that they saw no immediate contradiction between the belief in American exceptionalism as the tonic of liberty for all mankind and the existence of slavery at home - although plenty of abolitionists were of course challenging this by the 1850s. It was common, for example, not to deny blacks equality or self-rule “as a matter of right.” Jefferson, among others, supported the idea of repatriation of blacks because he believed all had “the right to self-rule as a people…[repatriation] was meant to assure for blacks the same rights Americans were asserting. But the blacks had first to have a separate station, for that to become an equal one.” Similarly, regarding native Indians, while all whites took for granted that the natives’ way of life was doomed, the common belief was that they would take their place in the dominant culture when ready or perish if unable to do so. The eventual herding of natives onto Federal lands was not merely a reflection of aggressive settlers or racism, it was a manifestation of native inability to assimilate. It was one of the first signs that “underdeveloped” civilizations and nations needed to tutelage to progress

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in what Americans deemed to be a responsible manner. The interaction with natives did not change the general American perception, that all foreigners and people of all races were, at some level, inferior. The consensus was that the world would want to adopt, and would attempt to adopt, American ideals once it was mature enough to understand the self-evident superiority of the republican system. In spite of republicanism’s failures outside of North America during the first half of the nineteenth century, therefore Paine’s legacy of more activist methods lived on. Few questioned the exceptionalist vision that the nation had come to embody.

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This American exceptionalist vision was epitomized by John O’Sullivan, editor of the Democratic Review, in 1839. Echoing every past major national thinker on America’s global role, he defined America as “the nation of human progress” and “destined to manifest to mankind the excellence of divine principles” and ensure the creation of “many Republics, comprising hundreds of happy millions.” Mirroring the Declaration of Independence, he described a horizonless future for man guided by liberty and American principles. But O’Sullivan spoke not of motives or of empire. The true mission of Manifest Destiny was never just Texas, California, or the Pacific. It was—as Paine had insisted—the world. To O’Sullivan, America’s birth was “the beginning of a new history…our country is “destined to be the great nation of futurity.”


The zest of westward expansion at the expense of the native Indians and Mexicans has led many historians to dismiss such lofty claims as mere rhetoric. Instead they define nineteenth century American foreign policy as perpetual expansion in the pursuit of empire and profit, often based on racial motives. One scholar even questions if “the idea and reality of America [is] possible without empire?” Given America’s massive absorption of land during this period and President Polk’s weak justification for the 1846 war against Mexico—which gave Americans control of the Southwest and California—such an argument is not without merit. Certainly, commerce “gave expansion an irresistible momentum.”

Many of the politicians and speculators who pressed for expansion did so in pursuit of profit in the west. Their stories of power and avarice are telling and they contribute significantly to our understanding of Midwest and Pacific American history.

But too much emphasis on the influence of imperialism and capitalism obscures that significantly more was going on. Scholarly arguments that define expansion and foreign policy as “manifest design,” and dismiss idealistic arguments as mere rationalizations of economic or social desires, are left wanting. History on the long axis is more than the sum of its parts. America was more than a nation of hustlers. The national socialization that shaped the cosmologies of those Americans who moved

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westward would have reinforced every argument that men like O’Sullivan pressed. Theirs was a nation with no natural shared ethnic identity, a nation, in other words, that knew no natural borders. The ideology of exceptionalism and the essence that theirs’ was a nation unlike any other – a boundless nation – constituted the essence of the American religiosity. This ideology existed – pace historian Loren Baritz – more in the bloodstream than in the mind. This is why expansion cannot simply be seen as a euphemism for empire. Only if individuals’ agency can be explained without the influence of memory, without the impression of socialization, without the influence of past and present, or without nationalistic expectations for the future – that is, without the impact of cultural and historical consciousness – would the argument that American expansion was driven largely by a desire for empire or profit appear convincing.

It is insufficient to think only in terms of capitalism and empire, particularly in the context of nineteenth century America, because even American contemporaries explained westward expansion in far more complex terms than mere imperialism. And they did not need to. Even in an era of rising abolitionism, the rationalization of expansion by references to profit or empire should have been perfectly acceptable; it is only by modern standards that expansion appears unpalatable if not genocidal. But such an explanation was not acceptable for Americans. If it had been, then theirs would have been a nation like any other, and that was something that contemporaries, as well as past and future generations always rejected.

Expansion, when viewed within the larger context of American history, in other words, tells us something significant about Americans’ national self-perception. It was
the epitome of progress. Even John Quincy Adams, no supporter of slavery or war, insisted that the U.S. had a “moral and religious duty” to expand. Though he deplored Andrew Jackson’s methods, Adams still viewed expansion as America’s destiny. His contemporaries concurred. “Democracy in its true sense is the last best revelation of human thought...[its] essence is justice [its] object is human progress,” Democratic Review insisted.\(^{33}\) It was therefore without a hint of doubt that the highly influential nineteenth century historian George Bancroft argued that as God’s chosen people Americans would ensure man’s development and that America's spreading influence would bring liberty and freedom to more and more of the world. Culturally, this belief was evident in symbols and in values. The changing iconography in magazines and posters, for example, confirmed Bancroft’s views. In the 1790s, these had detailed classical symbols of liberty. By the 1830s and 1840s, however, images depicted lush fields and factories, reflecting the American belief that progress followed liberty. Expansion \textit{ipso facto} came to mean the growth of liberty in the American mind.\(^{34}\)

Behind every foreign policy initiative from the Mexican war onwards then, policymakers and intellectuals successfully could establish ideational links between contemporary actions and the founding generation’s purpose for the nation. This helps explain why Manifest Destiny’s tone of moral certainty and sweeping ideas sat so well with Americans; Manifest Destiny was simply an extension of the founders’ legacy. It

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\(^{33}\) “Democracy Must Finally Reign,” Democratic Review (March 1840).

also helps explain the deep disillusion felt by the true Manifest Destinarians when Polk balked at the complete takeover of Mexico and proved unwilling to fight London over Oregon. The president’s hesitation in both cases illustrates the political realities that elected men face. During the latter half of the antebellum period, the unpredictable domestic consequences of slavery made unrestrained expansion – for now – too great a price to pay. It is testament to the tremendous ideological potency of American righteousness, however, that the forces of universalist ideals could only be checked by sectional strife rather than completely extinguished. It is testimony to the permanence of these convictions that even when that the price came in the form of civil war, Abraham Lincoln easily linked this conflict to America’s global obligation. It was America’s duty, he insisted as he honored the dead at Gettysburg, to ensure “that these dead shall not have died in vain—that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom—and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.”35 What made the Gettysburg Address one of the most powerful political speeches in American history was not its recognition of the battle’s victims but that in one brief paragraph, President Lincoln had fueled America’s rebirth with a simple reminder of the glory of the nation’s inception, the values that the American experiment represented, and its global missionary responsibility. The Civil War was at its core, after all, a clash of cultural, social, and political ideas; it was a war about ways of life. It does not get much more ideological than that.

This belief in American destiny unsurprisingly had consequences reflected in behavior once the domestic crisis concluded by the end of the 1870s and the nation strengthened militarily and financially. These changes began to erode many of the founders’ apprehensions concerning the nation’s entanglement in affairs overseas. Indeed, if Jefferson or John Quincy Adams had had the technological, financial and military power available to later generations, they too might have found being “just” an exemplar to the world too tepid. We will never know. What is clear, is that by the end of the nineteenth century the founders’ heirs were no longer content with such a passive role.

In 1898, Americans intervened militarily in Cuba and the Philippines in hopes of ending Catholic Spain’s brutality and to ensure their ability to protect a future canal linking the Pacific and the Atlantic oceans. They embraced President McKinley’s self-imposed duty to “educate the Filipinos and uplift them and Christianize them, and by God’s grace do the very best we can for them, as our fellow men.” Given America’s national self-perception, it was hardly surprising that such progressivism became an integral part of foreign policy as well. To many, the extension of this progressivism abroad simply confirmed the direction America’s moral compass had always pointed in. This was why, despite some public criticism at home, that so many Americans effortlessly dismissed the violence perpetrated in their nation’s name. McKinley’s successor, Theodore Roosevelt found it as easy as his predecessor had, to tap into the nation’s popular enthusiasm for an American role in the world. Contrasting the U.S. with China, Roosevelt believed that his nation by its very nature could not “be content to rot
by inches in ignoble ease within our borders,” but rather “must strive to play a great part in the world.” Despite Emilio Aguinaldo’s insurgency against the American presence in the Philippines, Roosevelt saw no choice for the U.S. but to stay and civilize the islands or otherwise risk tarnishing the reputation of American greatness. For Americans, this greatness was epitomized by the nation’s ability to enlighten the uneducated, for the Filipinos could not be handed the “impossible task of working out their own salvation.” If the United States abandoned the Philippines, they would not only be ensuring the downfall of the Filipinos, they would also be admitting that America’s mission was not without limitations.36

Like presidents before and since, therefore, Roosevelt saw few contradictions between his vocal support for international law and the often brutal actions by American marines in the Philippines. His thinking concerning Latin America was similarly ideological. The 1904 Roosevelt corollary to the Monroe Doctrine spoke of a natural U.S. responsibility to ensure justice when its neighbors failed to fulfill the responsibilities of modern nations. Order, he believed, could only come at the hand of the Americans. His successors William Howard Taft and Woodrow Wilson would, with some modifications, pursue similar policies up through the early years of the Great War in 1914 when Wilson intervened south of the border on several occasions. Significantly, he did not intervene to support American businesses – he viewed it as a “very perilous thing to determine the

foreign policy of a nation in terms of material interest” – but because, as he insisted, “the idea of America is to serve humanity.”³⁷

Many scholars interpret this shift in U.S. foreign policy, beginning with the Spanish War, as a strong deviation from American tradition. Some view these policies as responses to domestic concerns of over-civilized decadence, moral degeneration, or stifled masculinity. They view the economic crisis, the abundance of consumer goods, and the absence of war as central to the watershed they define in 1890s foreign policy and as central to the interventionism America pursued. Others second that conclusion, using it to build on their argument that expansion was primarily about markets; they see nothing but imperialism during this period.³⁸ Both gender and mammon have their place here, but primarily as unique pieces of insight into a particular generation, not as exclusive explanations of American foreign policy or national identity. Although there certainly was a crisis of masculinity in the 1890s, and although some businessmen dreamt of the China market, there was far more continuity than change in this era.

In fact even before the outbreak of the Spanish-American War, the reverend Josiah Strong echoed the contour and culture of the American mind. The nation’s mission was to “spread those principles…necessary to the perfection of the race to which it is destined; the entire realization of which will be the kingdom of heaven fully come on

Like O’Sullivan, and so many others before or since, Strong was making the white man’s burden an American one. With Spain defeated, Senator Albert J. Beveridge (R-IN) similarly insisted that Americans must establish “order where chaos reigns,” making them responsible for the fate of others. In contrast to the European imperial powers, the Americans assumed more than a rhetorical responsibility. They did not annex the Philippines, but instead, through private and public efforts, launched tutelage projects to prepare the country for self-rule. The U.S. government, the Rockefeller Foundation, the International Health Board, The Carnegie Corporation of New York, and many others played vital roles in establishing schools, hospitals, and roads throughout the Philippines. By 1952, even Aguinaldo, the old hero of the anti-American insurgency, praised this American nation-building effort.40

Along similar lines, Woodrow Wilson at the end of World War One insisted on creating the Mandate system to help prepare former German and Ottoman territories for independence and self-rule. These efforts to ensure the eventual national self-determination help explain why Americans – however unconvincing the argument may appear in hindsight – felt that they, with no apparent contradiction, could talk about their “empire” as progressive and the Europeans’ as archaic and authoritarian. While it often must have seemed like a distinction without a difference to the Filipino, the Cuban, or the

Haitian that bore the brunt of this “progressivism,” U.S. foreign policy was embracing a mission reinforced by its historical consciousness and dedicated to the improvement of the world. The generation of politicians that came to power in the 1890s and would lead Americans into the Great War, therefore, did not symbolize a new beginning for America, but rather a fulfillment of American ideology. Only in scope were their actions new. Whether “the schoolboyish bellicosity of Theodore Roosevelt or the schoolmasterish moralism of Woodrow Wilson,” the insistence on America as the agent of human progress converged with providence during this era once again. In such a context, exemplarism could not satisfy a nation that for over a century had defined itself as man’s savior. It was no surprise, then, that the quest to actively make the world safe for democracy was just around the corner.41

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America’s entry into the First World War in April 1917 marked the apotheosis of progressivism. Even when President Wilson kept America neutral in the wars’ first years, he did so as a matter of disinterest – in the classical sense of the word – but not because he was indifferent to the war. Only from a position of high morality, he believed, could Americans help bring an end to the European slaughter. He blamed the European balance of power system, authoritarian governments, and imperialism for the war. As McDougall has put it, Wilson, sounding “like that old Enlightenment radical Tom Paine,” blamed “governments for the corruption of men instead of men for the corruption of

governments.” But his attempts to bring peace thorough American-led mediation failed. No one complied when he called for the belligerents to pursue “peace without victory.”

Wilson had in part won re-election in 1916 on the slogan “he kept us out of war.” However, domestic pressure was building for greater American involvement. It came in particular from the *New Republic* and its founder Herbert Croly. Even before the war, Croly, in the highly ideological book *The Promise of American Life*, had argued that the U.S. “must by every practical means encourage the spread of democratic methods and ideas.” Alongside Croly, Walter Lippmann and John Dewey pushed similar views. They dismissed the notion that America’s contribution to mankind could be exemplarist only. Referencing Paine, Lippmann in 1915 called for a “League of Peace” to prevent future wars. Such a league’s “service to mankind may well be,” Lippmann insisted, “world citizenship.” The journal’s editors pleaded with Wilson to pursue global leadership. If the U.S. took on what they believed was its destined role, the President would turn “this crisis into the service of mankind” and pledge “the country to the principle that only in a world where Belgium is safe can the United States be safe.”

Despite such pleas, moving the national consciousness from peace to war should not have come easily. Politically the nation in 1917 was as divided as at any point in its history. Nevertheless, as Wilson addressed Congress that April he demonstrated the

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ease with which American politicians can invoke American exceptionalist ideology when he appealed to the American people’s sense of mission above all else. The manner was especially telling because there was no need to appeal to morality. There was no need to speak of a peculiar American responsibility to save the world. If Imperial Germany defeated the British Empire it would be a threat to America’s role in the world -- including the western hemisphere. There were, in other words, grounds for entering the war on concerns of national security. But Wilson did not make the realist argument. Instead, in a manner that only Americans could, he turned the Great War into an ideological crusade. It is simplistic to argue that this intervention was nothing more than “ancillary to their main concern, which was to help the English” or that intervention was largely a stylistic cover for an American bid for global hegemony. Wilson did not desire victory over Germany, but rather aimed to destroy “those banes of humankind that Germany stood for – imperialism, militarism, and autocracy.” He may have meant it scornfully but the British economist John Maynard Keynes was right, the war to Wilson was “essentially theological.” But it was a theology rooted not only in strong Presbyterian convictions but also in a belief that only America could make the difference in a fallen world. Though he certainly was not immune to the economic benefits the war brought to America, he insisted that America had no self-interests, craved no territory, and would demand no reparations. Wilson brought Americans into the war “for the rights of mankind and for the future peace and security of the world.”

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The right is more precious than peace, and we shall fight for the things which we have always carried nearest our hearts - for democracy, for the right of those who submit to authority to have a voice in their own Governments, for the rights and liberties of small nations, for a universal dominion of right by such a concert of free peoples as shall bring peace and safety to all nations and make the world itself at last free. To such a task we can dedicate our lives and our fortunes, everything that we are and everything that we have, with the pride of those who know that the day has come when America is privileged to spend her blood and her might for the principles that gave her birth and happiness and the peace which she has treasured. God helping her, she can do no other.47

Wilson’s address was an ideological summoning of America’s cultural and historical consciousness. It spoke to – what Gordon Wood in a different context calls – the genus Americanus. He chose this kind of rhetoric not only because he believed in it – he did – but because the American people did. Even one of his strongest Senate critics, Bob LaFollette (R-WI), conceded that Wilson’s words were expertly “calculated to appeal to American hearts,” and they did just that. Another critic, the writer Randolph Bourne, strongly attacked intellectuals for affirming Wilson’s ideological rhetoric and following in his warpath. It was “as if the war and [intellectuals] had been waiting for each other,” Bourne insisted. He was only half right. The desire to live up to a global responsibility ran far deeper than just the intellectual minority. Americans rallied to the war “to make the world safe for democracy,” to make it “a war to end all wars.”48

Wilson’s justification of a war for justice and democracy received a boost from the collapse of Czarist Russia in the early months of 1917. This event was especially

47 Woodrow Wilson, “For Declaration of War Against in Germany” in Selected Literary and Political Papers, pp. 234-247.
inspirational to those progressive Americans who had been actively involved in a “crusade for a free Russia” since the 1880s. A telling drawing in *Life* magazine from May carries the caption “Welcome Russia.” It depicts Lady Liberty riding a Russian bear and carrying a sign with the years 1776 and 1917 inscribed. In a similar spirit, the elder George Kennan (the relative of later diplomat George Frost Kennan) announced that “the struggle for freedom in Russia…has ended at last in the complete triumph of democracy,” while Harvard scholar Leo Wiener insisted that Russia and the U.S. were now “bound to work together as the two greatest republics on the terrestrial globe.” Lippmann too believed that “Democracy is infectious – the entrance of the Russian and American democracies is sure to be a stimulus to Democracies everywhere.” He was certain that the war would “dissolve into democratic revolution the world over.”

Once again, Americans would be disillusioned by a European revolution. The Bolshevik coup at the end of 1917 sent shock waves through the U.S. not only because it meant Russia’s withdrawal from the war, but because it brought to the international political arena a new ideological power that mirrored Americans’ own ambitions. Indeed, the only way the U.S. response to Lenin’s international communist movement can be understood, is if its call for world revolution is viewed as a direct challenge to America’s

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global mission. It was a response that domestically was evident in the First Red Scare as well. The Bolsheviks believed history to be on their side, much as Americans did. Their mission to overthrow the nation state everywhere was a call for the most radical transformation of mankind’s political future to emerge since either 1789 or 1776.

The October Revolution did not prevent an Allied military victory, but for Wilson, winning the war proved easier than winning the peace. Schooled as he was in an American culture that hailed liberty, righteousness and justice, his attempt to create an American-led League to save the world from itself was hardly surprising. His call for collective security to enchain “the monster that had resorted to arms” signaled a battle between good and evil that many Americans believed their nation destined to engage. But Wilson was the wrong messenger. The Senate rejected Wilson’s design for a new world order largely because of his obstinate, go-it-alone, moralistic political style and the seemingly ungrateful and uncooperative European politicians. These same issues also served to undermine the President at home. Nevertheless, the calamity of Wilson and the progressives’ attempt to establish a world order in the American image did not ignite a seismic shift in U.S. ideology. Wilson’s opponents and successors did not question American greatness any more than previous generations had. Like Americans before them, they merely disagreed over how to discharge this responsibility.

51 For an early firsthand account of the threat Bolshevism posed to the American way of life, see, Ole Hanson, *Americanism versus Bolshevism* (Doubleday Page and Company, 1920).
American foreign policy between the two world wars is often described as “isolationist.” When compared to Wilson’s ambitious plans, the United States’ rejection of membership in the League of Nations, protectionist trade policies, demands for war-debt repayments, exclusive exclusionary immigration policies, and strict neutrality during the period from 1921-1941 does indeed imply limited international cooperation on America’s part. Despite this limited cooperation, the U.S. was neither isolationist, nor particularly anti-Wilsonian during this period. In voice perhaps, but not in deed. This is unsurprising, because, even though Wilson’s aims had been more ambitious than deemed palatable by many Americans, it was the man more so than his policies that most despised by 1919. Even one of his strongest later critics, the diplomat George Frost Kennan, eventually came to accept that Wilson, much like Thomas Paine, had simply been ahead of his time. From an ideological perspective, the interwar period is significant because it was during these two decades that Americans found themselves faced with powerful alternative interpretations of modernity. The challenge posed by these foreign ideologies inspired ideas and policies that would take America into war again in 1941; ideas that would remain central to U.S. foreign policy long after VE day and VJ day.

Between the wars, Americans engaged the world on an unprecedented scale. Globally they launched private and public modernization projects for the “construction of

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American volunteer organizations and missionaries working through NGOs launched efforts to promote American values, encourage trade, provide medical support, institute educational reforms, and spread American culture in China, Latin America, Russia, and elsewhere. These efforts were, in part, driven by Americans’ determination to contribute to the welfare of others, but they were also driven by America’s new-found economic strength. It was a reflection of how the U.S. had replaced Great Britain as the primary economic power in large parts of the world.

This global effort to spread the American dream, in Emily Rosenberg’s apt phrase, was not done solely through non-governmental organizations; the government also lent a hand. Even when Republicans controlled the White House from 1921 to 1933, America remained firmly internationalist. Men like Elihu Root, Charles Evan Hughes, Frank Kellogg, and Henry Stimson all pressed for American involvement in the world. In the inaugural issue of *Foreign Affairs*, Root charted a very Wilsonian vision. Defining Americans’ agenda as the world, he insisted that the “control of foreign relations by democracies creates a new and pressing demand for popular education in foreign affairs.” By implication, then, being a mere exemplar was no longer feasible. Hughes went a step further in a 1922 speech to the American Bar Association. Convinced that Americans

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55 Such projects built on nineteenth-century American efforts to create educational institutions in the Middle East and Asia as well as extensive missionary activities in the Far East, particularly China. Like the Peace Corps later on, these organizations were genuine enough in their own right, but they also played a vital role in spreading American ideals abroad. See, Ekbladh, *Great American Mission*.

stood on the side of international justice, he insisted that the creation of permanent international courts should be “a distinct feature” of U.S. foreign policy.  

Internationalism was also evident in the United States’ policies on arms control, international drug trafficking, health and disease prevention, and in its greater sense of global economic responsibility, the latter lasting at least until October 1929. To strengthen its own position, the government committed itself to treaties outlawing war and set up an observer position at the League of Nations. Republicans also continued Wilson’s policy of denying legitimacy to the Soviet regime, with President Coolidge insisting that he would not work with Moscow until they proved willing to “take up the burdens of civilization with the rest of us.”

Scholars who view this era as one of tepid or isolationist U.S. foreign policy do so, it would appear, on a false premise. It is worth noting, after all, that it was the creation – and the American creation at that – of an international league to secure peace that was revolutionary, not the absence of its American leadership. There were, of course, some members of Congress as well as private citizens, including several that became influential in the America First Committee in the 1930s, who remained strongly opposed to any greater U.S. role in the world. The rapid erosion of the global capitalist system, for example, caused powerful Senators like Arthur Vandenberg (R-MI) and Gerald Nye (R-ND) to intensify their support for U.S. neutrality and the influential theologian Reinhold Niebuhr to declare “the western world in the process of disintegration.” But even as they


did, challenges were looming that soon nullified the belief that America would sit on the sidelines. As Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr. (R-MC) acknowledged, neutrality was an unsustainable luxury of geography.59

By the early 1930s, ideological threats appeared that, through their own unique interpretations and visions of modernity, posed strong challenges to America’s role in the world: fascism in Italy, militarism in Japan, international communism, and National Socialism in Germany. Authoritarian powers appeared to be on the rise, while the liberal democracies were faltering. For most of the thirties, Americans tried to stem the ideological threat through tactical maneuvers such as establishing diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union – the last major liberal democracy to do so – in the hope that they could both convince Stalin to halt his pursuit of anti-democratic activities around the world, and enlist his help containing Japanese expansionism in the Far East. This policy proved unsuccessful as evidenced by the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact in 1939 and the continued Japanese expansion into China after 1937.60

Americans also launched a number of development efforts – preludes to the modernization programs of the fifties and sixties – intended to provide less advanced

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60 For a brief moment, Americans came to believe, once again, that they would turn the Soviet Union toward democracy. William Bullitt, the first American ambassador to Moscow dreamt of building the American Embassy Moscow as a replica of Monticello. That desire demonstrated both the depth of America’s sense of mission and the overwhelming inability to understand Stalin’s Soviet Union. No Monticello was ever built in the Soviet Union. For this story, see, Foglesong, The American Mission, pp. 77-79. For how the United States dealt with foreign ideological threats during this period, see Benjamin Alpers, Dictators, Democracy and American Public Culture: Envisioning the Totalitarian Enemy, 1920s-1950s (The University of North Carolina Press, 2003).
nations the ability to develop socially, politically, and economically. These programs were particularly inspired by the growing “assumption that all societies carried a latent bacillus for totalitarianism that was easily made virulent by the forces of modernity,” as Ekbladh aptly puts it. Poor and underdeveloped nations appeared especially susceptible, further supporting the perceived need for American-led international development.  

These development efforts drew inspiration from a number of New Deal programs including the Tennessee Valley Authority. Liberals like Arthur Morgan, Roosevelt’s head of the TVA, Eugene Staley, who during later became influential in the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration, Edgar Snow and Nelson Rockefeller took on increasingly important roles, particularly in China and Latin America. In China, Snow began publishing the journal democracy in an effort to spread American political ideals. It proved short-lived because of the Sino-Japanese war, but it was a prime example of the desire among Americans to influence the far corners of the world. Similarly in Latin America, the U.S. government launched cultural and economic programs to undermine the perceived fascist threat in the western hemisphere. 

61 Ekbladh, The Great American Mission, pp. 70-76; Merle Curti and Kendall Birr, Prelude to Point Four: American Technical Missions Overseas, 1838-1938 (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1954). Curti and Birr’s account is concerned primarily with the technical and administrative details rather than the ideas behind American overseas missions. As a result, the book has long since been forgotten but it is a compelling example of how many operations were in the works around the world even before the Second World War.

The editor of *Time* and *Life* magazines, Henry Luce, struck this chord in a famous 1941 article. Though the article is often only superficially referred to because of its prophecy of the “American Century” that followed, Luce’s piece was considerably more substantive. Echoing so many previous thinkers on foreign policy, he summoned Americans, claiming that it, “now becomes our time to be the powerhouse from which the ideals spread throughout the world and do their mysterious work of lifting the life of mankind.” He wanted Americans to become “the Good Samaritans of the world.” Like Staley, Luce was calling for an American global modernization mission. In the absence of American guidance, he worried that lesser nations would pursue other ideological paths towards modernity, paths antithetical to America’s visions. The wars by then raging in Europe and Asia Luce insisted, were not simply about territory or national security but about values and the American way of life.63

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Even without men like Luce or organizations like the Committee to Defend America by Aiding the Allies, sounding the alarm over foreign ideological threats, it was never likely that the American perception of national greatness could be contained. The fall of France in the summer of 1940 underlined that the global military and ideological crisis could not be solved in America’s favor without active U.S. involvement. In December, Roosevelt warned the American people that failure to stop the Axis powers would mean a “new and terrible era in which the whole world, our hemisphere included, would be run by threats of brute force. And to survive in such a world, we would have to convert ourselves

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63 Luce, “The American Century.”
permanently into a militaristic power on the basis of war economy.” Though Hitler and Hirohito talked “of a ‘new order’ in the world,” they actually desired the “revival of the oldest and the worst tyranny.” Reviving Wilsonian language, Roosevelt insisted that the fight against the Axis was “democracy’s fight against world conquest.” America had a duty to fight for “the defense of our civilization and for the building of a better civilization in the future.”

In March 1941 Congress formally abandoned neutrality. The Lend-Lease Act, which supported the Allies financially and with materiel, signaled – far more than Pearl Harbor did – America’s entry into the war. While Roosevelt commended that Act’s passage, Senator Arthur Vandenberg feared that the law would turn the White House into the headquarters for all future wars. In his diary he wrote, “I hope I am hopelessly wrong when I say that I fear they will live to regret their votes beyond anything else...I had the feeling I was witnessing the suicide of the Republic.” Vandenberg misunderstood. Lend-Lease signaled that Americans would live up to the global responsibilities the nation had always assumed history intended for it to bear.

Four months later, Pearl Harbor quelled the last opposition to war within the United States. The Japanese attack made obsolete any serious beliefs that America could best serve the world and protect itself as merely an exemplar. It confirmed the suspicion – present ideologically since the nation’s birth – that America’s freedoms were always

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under threat. If the great oceans had once been viewed as the protectors of the American experiment, they were now seen as a highway to America. Realist scholars often argue that this threat explains U.S. efforts in the Second World War and in the Cold War. They see American actions as straight-up responses to the national security threats posed by Hitler and later by Stalin. But the conclusion Americans drew was much grander than a straightforward response to security threats. They recognized that highways run in both directions, concluding, as David Reynolds points out, that only in a world organized along American ideals and principles could Americans be secure. Only in that sort of world could freedom be preserved, and only though an active American role could it be secured. This belief was evidenced by the manner in which Americans chose to fight the war and in their active construction of an international order. Both had deep roots in American thought on the nation’s role in the world. Both were prodigiously ideological.66

Even before the Japanese attack, many Americans were defining the war in a language that resonated with their sense of mission and freedom. In 1940, Henry Stimson, now FDR’s Secretary of War, paraphrased Lincoln and the bible, insisting that the world could no longer survive “half-slave and half-free.” For more than 400 years, he insisted, “Americans’ ancestors have been struggling to build up an international civilization based upon law and justice.” Now they were faced with ultimate struggle between freedom and despotism. In this struggle, Stimson believed, there could be no

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compromise.\textsuperscript{67} This view that the war was existential awakened another Civil War legacy that Jackson Lears, in his study of the American mind, calls “the long shadow of Appomattox.” The Axis powers were not seen as ordinary foes, but as challengers to everything America stood for, just as the Confederacy had during the Civil War. Despite the impracticality and the certain additional loss of American lives, Roosevelt demanded – as had Lincoln – the enemies’ unconditional surrender. The aggressors would be held morally responsible for the war, punished accordingly, and would have their ideologies eradicated. This justified the execution of the war by any means necessary. Once again, Americans turned a war into a global crusade, into a conflict of moral right and moral wrong, into an eschatological struggle.\textsuperscript{68}

As detailed in following chapters, the execution of the war covered only half of America’s perceived responsibility. The eradication of America’s enemies and their false world visions ignited the historic claim to design a new global order. As Wilson’s heir apparent, it was no surprise that Franklin Roosevelt undertook measures to ensure this order, nor was it surprising that the American people so wholeheartedly embraced them. But Roosevelt wanted an even more closely integrated system than the one Wilson had proposed at Versailles. Like Wilson, FDR believed this new order demanded American leadership and that the development of “positive nationalisms” was the key to freedom and democracy in the world. The thirties had shown what could happen when societies were not “exposed to the American form of progress, but rather were hijacked by false”

\textsuperscript{67} “Stimson Hails Boys Facing Issues as they Enter the World’s Darkest Hour,” \textit{New York Times}, June 15, 1940.
ideologies. In 1943, when Roosevelt met Churchill in Casablanca, the President laid out his thoughts for a grand vision of international reform. Roosevelt’s plans for reforms and practices laid out in this “globalization moment” would lead towards the creation of new international institutions by the end of the war. Structurally, this would come in the form of the United Nations and the new international economic order. But what Roosevelt sought in more practical terms was, according to David Kennedy, a world order in which the U.S. would “play an engaged international role—but only if the rules of the international system were altered in accordance with American goals, putting the world on a pathway to more international cooperation and better international behavior.”69

Roosevelt summed up the historic American mission that the Greatest Generation was now fulfilling when, in October 1944, he insisted that Americans would never “again be thwarted in our will to live as a mature Nation, confronting limitless horizons. We shall bear our full responsibility, exercise our full influence, and bring our full help and encouragement to all who aspire to peace and freedom.”70 The President’s words echoed the nation’s cultural and historical legacy. It is one that influences the decisions of every American president. Whatever professional ideas or perceptions of national interests they bring to office, the values and cosmologies instilled by their distinct American socialization and heritage is at least to some degree inescapable. American exceptionalist

ideology has always been teleological in nature. If it were not, the core of its convictions would not have proven so permanent over time. If it were not, rhetoric from the Revolutionary era would not seem so strikingly contemporary to every generation.
3. The Quest for an American World Order, 1941-1945

The United States’ home soil was left untouched by the Second World War. While American wartime losses —just below five hundred thousand— were substantial, they were dwarfed by the casualties of other powers, who for the second time in thirty years could speak of lost generations. Unlike the citizens of Europe and Asia, Americans were not displaced, and they were not starving. Their infrastructure was intact and their agricultural and industrial production high. The absence of domestic destruction and social chaos afforded Americans the opportunity to think more clearly about the reconstruction and redesign of the postwar order than any of their allies. American exceptionalist ideology made them think about it more comprehensively. Just as the Great Depression had provided President Franklin Roosevelt with “a chance to reform America, so the Second World War offered an opportunity to reform the world, not so as to enrich America, but to preserve the nation and proselytize its values.”

Roosevelt envisaged the United States as the epicenter of a new international postwar world. His ideas, even if often general thoughts rather than carefully designed plans, reflected traditional American visions of freedom, liberty, private property, morality, and justice. Assisted by Secretary of State Cordell Hull, FDR sougth a strong organization of United Nations that would ensure international security, establish permanent global peace and maintain a commitment to the protection and promotion of

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human rights around the world. He also backed an economic order under the Bretton Woods system in which international institutions, supported by the strongest powers, could secure free trade and provide financial support for developing nations and for countries facing dire economic conditions. The responsibility of the great powers, he believed, would be to serve and not to dominate the peoples of the world. The world he sought, the world Americans sought, was one in which empires were dismantled, preferential trade systems undone, and national self-determination thrived.

Upon returning from the Inter-Allied Foreign Minister Conference in Moscow in 1943, Hull summed up these ideas before a joint session of Congress in words that could have just as easily emanated from Paine or Wilson. He announced to rapturous applause that in the American-backed postwar order there would “no longer be need for spheres of influence, for alliances, for balance of power, or any other of the special arrangements through which, in the unhappy past, the nations strove to safeguard their security or to promote their interest.”² This increasingly utopian American perception of the postwar world presumed that other powers would transform into responsible members of the new order. As Roosevelt told one reporter in 1943, he expected the war to have calmed the revolutionary enthusiasm in the Soviet Union. He now anticipated all major powers participating in a “social as well as international peace, with progress following evolutionary constitutional lines.” This implied that not only would the Soviet Union reform but Great Britain too would be forced to abandon its policies of imperial preferentialism and colonial overlordship. No longer would there be a place for planned

political and economic systems or discriminatory imperial practices. Almost fifty years later, the political scientist Francis Fukuyama proclaimed this Rooseveltian prophecy fulfilled when, in an influential essay, he argued that the global spread of liberal democracy and free market capitalism signaled the completion of mankind’s socio-political evolution and the triumph of western values over other political ideologies.

Roosevelt’s project for the postwar world stood in stark contrast to the narrower visions of the other members of the Grand Alliance. Winston Churchill’s Great Britain harbored more traditional ambitions. The Prime Minister expected a world dominated by strong powers in which the British Empire held a seat equal to that of the United States. Josef Stalin too thought in terms of power and influence. His Communist vision for the postwar order rested, as Vladislav Zubok and Constantine Pleshakov make clear, on a “socialist imperialism” that at minimum gave the Soviet Union absolute control of Eastern Europe. A less ideologically minded victor than the U.S. might have viewed this kind of power division with favor. But for both Roosevelt and later Truman, the sense of mission and the influence of American exceptionalism were far too strong to allow such a scheme. Both presidents blamed the old game of great power politics and the alliances that came with it for twice bringing the world to the brink of destruction. They had no intention of rebuilding such a world. In 1942, then Senator Truman lamented that World

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3 “Roosevelt’s World Blue Print, Saturday Evening Post, April 10, 1943.” Sumner Welles, Roosevelt’s Under Secretary of State, in 1951 insisted that FDR was certain “that communism would never prevail provided democracy became a living reality...[with a similar] self-sacrificing fervor shown by the Marxists in fighting for their creed.” For more, see his, Seven Major Decisions that Shaped History (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1951), p. 190.


5 Zubok and Pleshakov, Inside the Kremlin’s Cold War, Zubok, A Failed Empire, pp. 6-8, 21-27. Except for the most fierce Cold War revisionists, the idea that the Soviet Union was an imperialist power is now commonly accepted among Cold War scholars. For more on this see chapter five.
War II was simply the Great War by extension. In 1919, “the victors of that war had the opportunity to compel a peace that would protect us from war…They missed that opportunity.” America, he insisted, would not fail again.⁶

Not all received this gospel of a liberal world order—a gospel resting on moralistic and legalistic principles—with equal favor. Several diplomats and intellectuals derided the postwar plans as inconceivable, because they depended on the Soviet Union’s voluntary abandonment of Communism once the war ended. They rejected the notion that any international organization for the preservation of peace and security could take the place of “realistic” foreign policies dealing with the European power relationships, and they chastised Roosevelt for believing that mankind’s inherent goodness would lead to peace and order.⁷

The Roosevelt Administration had little interest in this vein of argument regardless of the authority of those who championed it. The Administration’s entrenched view that the superiority of its ideas and belief in the universal application of American ideals provided the United States with a mandate for international change disallowed the skepticism of dissenters. America’s historical and cultural consciousness, strengthened during the war, led both the President and the public to the conclusion that America was the world’s best hope. This intense conviction overshadowed any concern that in their


determination to weave the foundations of democratic capitalism and individual liberties into the international system they would challenge a force in Moscow of equally strong conviction. The result was an American postwar policy planned on the basis of hopes and ideals rather than one designed to serve realistic ends.

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American postwar peace planning was shaped by the experiences and memories of the Paris Peace Conference. The commonly held view among policymakers was that Wilson’s failure in 1919 to secure a global world order on American terms was a result of his not having wielded his power over the Europeans while they were still reliant on U.S. war efforts. Franklin Roosevelt was determined not to repeat this mistake. Though FDR was insistent on forcing an American influenced postwar order, his pendulum, nevertheless, swung back and forth throughout the war between divergent views of this order’s precise structure. His plans fluctuated to such an extent that scholars seven decades hence still debate whether Franklin Roosevelt was an idealist or a realist. Any conclusion about exact plans for the postwar world is complicated not only by the President’s premature death but also by the fact that he often acted as his own Secretary of State. Roosevelt made major foreign policy decisions almost completely independently of experts. He sidelined his secretaries of state and his vice-presidents to the extent that no aide inside the White House or the State Department could confidently interpret the

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President’s plans or his designs with any great degree of authority. This should not be taken to mean that Hull was an insignificant figure in the cabinet. Even if he never quite gained the President’s personal trust in the way Harry Hopkins or Sumner Welles did, Hull was Secretary of State for eleven years and for large parts of that time, he served as the primary spokesman for Roosevelt’s visions. If Hull appears less influential to some scholars it may well be because he was more consistent in his views than FDR ever was but it worth noting that on major postwar designs, Roosevelt, albeit often in a round-about way, accepted Hull’s views.

At one point, Roosevelt’s postwar peace initiative leaned toward placing security responsibilities exclusively in the hands of the major powers. The most frequently cited plan in this regard was the Four Policemen concept, which Roosevelt outlined to British Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden in March of 1942 and two months later to Soviet Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Molotov. The plan involved assigning regional policing powers in Europe, Asia, and Latin America to Great Britain, the Soviet Union, China, and the United States—the same four powers FDR envisioned would control the decision-making body in a future international security organization. The details of the plan and Roosevelt’s motivations behind it are, however, unclear. Did Roosevelt envision a small fellowship of well-armed nations maintaining world security? While he certainly imagined the great powers as the natural gendarmes of the world, it appears that he never

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9 Miscamble, *From Roosevelt to Truman*, p. 83. Defining FDR’s policy goals is further complicated by his determination to eliminate from the record any details about his personal decision-making process. He rejected, for example, the presence of note-takers during cabinet meetings. On this, see, Warren F. Kimball, *The Most Unsordid Act: Lend-Lease, 1939-1941* (The Johns Hopkins Press, 1969), p. 4.
supported granting these nations such autonomy as to rule entire regions; policing in Roosevelt’s view was for order, not domination.\textsuperscript{11} Perhaps, then, a more plausible explanation for the policemen concept is that FDR – affected by the League’s inability to respond to interwar conflicts – was seeking to ensure that peace would actually be enforceable once the Axis powers capitulated. Another likely explanation is that Roosevelt feared Congress would not authorize the deployment of American military forces overseas after the war’s end. Ensuring that the other great powers patrolled the beat on other continents, then, would prevent any international organization from being held captive to the moods of the American legislature.\textsuperscript{12} Whatever his motivations, the details of the Four Policemen plan remain vague and unclear. “The conception of a small policing body,” Roosevelt explained to Stalin at the Tehran conference in 1943—a full eighteen months after he first suggested the plan—was “just an idea, on which future study was required.”\textsuperscript{13} A year later the plan was dead and never again gained any serious attention. Even as permanent members of the Security Council, the four powers never acquired any of the regional control that FDR’s plans seemed to imply.

From 1944 on, planning returned instead to ideas that Roosevelt had first advanced three years earlier. In August 1941, FDR met Churchill in Placentia Bay, Newfoundland, to discuss their separate war aims and plans for the postwar order. Having narrowly survived the Battle of Britain and now having allied with Stalin after Hitler’s attack on the Soviet Union in June, Churchill’s delegation was hoping for a firm

\textsuperscript{11} Kimball, \textit{The Juggler}, pp. 96-97.
American military commitment to help win the war.\textsuperscript{14} The Americans, in contrast, approached the conference cautiously. Restrained by an emotional domestic debate over possible American belligerence, Roosevelt wanted the meeting to result only in a joint British-American declaration emphasizing that he and Churchill had discussed “certain principles relating to the civilization of the world.” He wanted to “enunciate the humanitarian principles Hitler’s opponents would follow after the war” and in the process preempt Stalin and Churchill from signing any old-world style, territorial deals that might signal the balance of power system’s return to Europe.\textsuperscript{15} Thus, the conference demonstrated the considerable gap in American and British thinking on the postwar world. While the Prime Minister sought a European order dictated by realpolitik and was intent on preserving the British Empire, the President’s ambitions were principled and global. The discussions were the first clear sign of Washington’s intent to leave an American thumbprint on the world once the war ended.

Plainly stated, Washington doubted that the Europeans would, on their own cognizance, show responsible leadership in the postwar world. FDR’s confidante, Adolf Berle, expressed this clearly, when in a memo to the President shortly before the meetings with Churchill he stated that “on the record of the past twenty years and the present conflict, it hardly seems that the British can make a statement of program; and their highly opportunist policy leaves her with little moral authority outside her own


territories.”\textsuperscript{16} At Placentia Bay, it fell to the tough talking Under Secretary of State, Sumner Welles, to explain American ideas to Churchill and his chief negotiator, the Permanent Under Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Sir Alexander Cadogan. Aware of Britain’s war-weariness, Welles did not shy away from pressuring the British to accept American designs. In the realm of economics, for example, he made it clear that American aid to Britain was dependent on the postwar establishment of “the freest possible economic interchange without discriminations, without exchange controls, without economic preference utilized for political purposes and without all of the manifold barriers which had...[been] responsible for the present world collapse.” This demand, entered into the Atlantic Charter concluded at the end of the Conference by Roosevelt and Churchill, deliberately targeted the 1932 Ottawa Imperial Preference Agreements between London and its dominions.\textsuperscript{17}

The Charter also called for sovereign rights and self-government of all peoples, improved international labor standards, social security, and for the establishment of “a wider and permanent system of general security.” In spirit, the document read like an internationalized version of the Four Freedoms the President had announced in his State

\textsuperscript{16} Adolf A. Berle, Jr. to Roosevelt, June 21, 1941, Franklin Delano Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, NY (Hereafter FDRL), Franklin Delano Roosevelt Papers, President’s Secretary File, State Department, 1941-1944, Box 34. I am grateful to the archivists at the FDRL for having provided me with these and other documents to me.

of the Union seven months earlier and the Fourteen Points Wilson had announced almost a quarter century before.  

It was a program designed to put an end to European global dominance and European empires.  

Winston Churchill, a gritty imperialist, predictably opposed this intervention in London’s internal affairs. In part because of the Prime Minister’s obstinacy, and in part out of fear that too strong a declaration might cause political opposition in Britain, the Americans revised the Charter language to imply that the agreement would show “due respect for... existing obligations.” This, then, appeared to afford the British the illusion of exemption from defined obligations. The compromise on language leads some scholars to conclude that Churchill successfully gutted the American “trade provision,” but such a view underestimates Washington’s determination and strength.  

Roosevelt’s assured Welles that “when the moment becomes ripe,” he would exert decisive pressure to build world order the Charter prepared for.  

The altered language might have helped Churchill politically but it would be a temporary reprieve. It was tactical on FDR’s part. Nothing more. As the war continued, Britain’s position continued to erode, affording the U.S. the leverage needed to establish its own agenda. This agenda served only to further undermine the British Empire. 

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19 Joint Statement by President Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill, August 14, 1941, FRUS 1941, vol. I, pp. 367-369. For the President’s views on this challenge to the British Empire, see the firsthand account by his son Elliott who was present at the Conference. Elliott Roosevelt, As He Saw It (New York: Duell, Sloan, and Pearce, 1946), pp. 24-25, 35-37.  
20 See, for example, Borgwardt, A New Deal for the World, pp. 27-28.  
21 Welles, Seven Decisions, pp. 179-181.  
22 Publicly, Welles made this emphasis on an American world order clear as well. Insisting that there could be no order, no freedom, and no security unless the postwar order was established along these very American ideals, he argued that a new “economic order in the post-war world which will give free play to individual enterprise, and at the same time render security to men and women and provide for the
Despite its highly inspirational language, the response to the Charter in the United States was mixed. The President of Columbia University, Nicholas Murray Butler, hailed it, in a letter to Roosevelt, as “another Declaration of Independence, but this time of international independence.” The Washington Post called it “a momentous document freighted with high hopes and great responsibilities.” Otherwise, the American press was incredulous. Most found the document too vague to mean American belligerency, while others found it too strong to ensure that America remained at peace.  

Regardless, it soon became clear that the Atlantic Charter was more than a symbol of good faith. In January 1942 – helped by the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor that formally made the U.S. a belligerent in the war – Roosevelt and Churchill, along with Soviet Ambassador Maxim Litvinov, Chinese Foreign Minister T.V. Soong, and representatives of twenty-two other governments at war with the Axis powers, signed a Declaration of the United Nations. Based on the Atlantic Charter, the declaration pledged its signatories to defend “life, liberty, independence, and religious freedom, and to preserve human rights and justice in their own land as well as in other lands.”

It was the first formal American attempt to globally redefine states’ responsibilities to citizens and ensure the protection of progressive improvement of living standards, is almost as essential as is the actual winning of the war.” See Sumner Welles, “Commercial Policy after the War,” October 7, 1941, Address before the National Foreign Trade Convention, full text in, New York Times, October 8, 1941 and “Welles Calls For Post-War World Plan,” Washington Post, October 8, 1941. For an unconvincing piece insisting that the Atlantic Charter did not intend to challenge Britain’s position in the word, see M.S. Venkataramani, “The United States, the Colonial Issue, and the Atlantic Charter Hoax,” International Studies, vol. 13, no. 1 (1974), pp. 1-28.


individuals across borders in the same the way American citizens were protected by
principles of rights at home.

In pamphlets and posters, the U.S. Office of War Information linked these values
to historical perceptions of a global American mission and merged them with the
principles of the Four Freedoms. One pamphlet declared that America, “with its ideas of
equality…against odds…has prospered and brought fresh hope to millions and new good
to humanity. Even in the thick of war the experiment goes ahead with old values and new
forms… [the] earth shrinks in upon itself and we adjust to a world in motion holding fast
to truth as we know it.”25 Vice President Henry Wallace in a speech to the Free World
Association embraced similar views. Calling for the liberation of the world he insisted
that while the bible preached social justice, the concept “was not given complete and
powerful political expression until our nation was formed as a Federal Union.” This,
Wallace believed, was America’s mission in the war. Welles concurred. On Memorial
Day, at Arlington National Cemetery he declared that it must now be U.S. policy to
“bring in its train the liberation of all peoples. Discrimination between peoples because of
their race, creed, or color must be abolished. The age of imperialism is ended…in all
oceans and in all continents.”26

Concurrent State Department plans are evidence that more than propaganda was
at play. The Department had begun drawing up ideas for the postwar order as early as

internationalist Senator Warren R. Austin hailed the pamphlet as effective and powerful. See Warren R.
Austin Papers (hereafter WRAP), The Special Collections, University of Vermont Library, Carton 32,
Folder 6.
December 1939. In the aftermath of the United Nations Declaration, these plans were prepared with a renewed vigor and infused with powerful American ideals.\textsuperscript{27} The 1942 Draft Constitution for an International Order went as far as to contain a strongly worded, 16-article long “Bill of Rights” for mankind. The bill aimed to outlaw dictatorship and ensure citizens of the world freedom of religion, freedom of speech, property rights, education, procedural rights, and other ideals lifted from America’s founding documents.\textsuperscript{28} The following spring, in a memo to the President, Hull explained that for these rights to be effectively pursued by the international community they needed to be established in writing as a mandate of the new international institution then still in its exploratory phase. By the late summer of 1943, “human rights” was integrated as Article 9 in the first American draft of what was already informally being referred to as the United Nations Charter.\textsuperscript{29}

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While the State Department under Cordell Hull and Sumner Welles prepared treaty language on international security and human rights, economic postwar planning moved to the Treasury Department under Secretary Henry Morgenthau, Jr. and his right hand man, Harry Dexter White. Morgenthau was an old friend of FDR’s and one of the few

\textsuperscript{27} For these plans, see, Division the Study of Problems of Peace and Reconstruction, December 12, 1939, U.S. Department of State, \textit{Postwar Foreign Policy Preparation, 1939-1945} (Washington, D.C., 1949), pp. 453-454.

\textsuperscript{28} The planning for a global Bill of Rights began in the State Department’s Subcommittee on Political Problems. The first plans were put forth as early as March 1942. Detailed planning took place between August and December, with the final document being completed by year’s end. For the deliberations on this, see State Department, \textit{Postwar Foreign Policy}, pp. 84, 115-116, 365, 386. For the complete “Bill of Rights,” established by the Department’s Special Subcommittee on Legal Problems, see \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 483-485.

Jews in the President’s inner circle. He would later play a prominent part on the War Refugee Board as well as author the punitive Morgenthau Plan proposal regarding the future of postwar Germany. It was as the President’s chief economist, however, that Henry Morgenthau left the greatest legacy. By the outbreak of the War, the consensus among American economists and politicians was that nationalistic and imperialistic policies had exacerbated the interwar global depression. To prevent future economic crises, Morgenthau’s top priority as Secretary became the creation of an international financial system to cope with issues like hunger, unemployment, displacement, and social chaos at the end of the war. Between 1942 and 1944, these plans revolved around the design of what would become the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the International Bank of Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), or World Bank, to help stabilize postwar conditions.

On top of these ambitious initiatives, the Americans attached demands for free trade. For over a decade, Cordell Hull had been the Administration’s advocate for principled non-discriminatory trade policies, but ideologically the roots went far deeper. Ever since George Washington’s Farewell Address, in which he advised that in trade with foreign powers Americans “hold an equal and impartial hand, neither seeking nor granting exclusive favors or preferences,” non-discrimination, equality, and reciprocity had, as the economic historian Richard Gardner points out, been principles of American
economic policy. It was only reluctantly that the United States had been drawn into trade wars of mercantilism.\(^30\)

The idea of free trade was already a central component of the 1941 Lend-Lease agreements with Great Britain and the Soviet Union. Formally approved by Congress in March 1941, the Lend-Lease Act, had given the President the authority to “sell, transfer title to, exchange, lease, lend, or otherwise dispose of, to any such government [the President deems vital to the defense of the U.S.] any defense article.”\(^31\) While Lend-Lease was vital for its war contribution to Great Britain and to the Soviet Union, the Administration also attached to it a, in the eyes of the recipients, more sinister caveat intended to reform international trade rules. Article VII of the agreement specifically served to liberalize international economic and trade policies now and in the future.\(^32\)

Repayment for lend-lease aid would not come, as Britain’s John Maynard Keynes had hoped, in the form of monies, goods, bases, or even unused goods. Assistant Secretary of

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\(^31\) “House Resolution 1776: A Bill Further to Promote the defense of the United States and for other purposes,” January 10, 1941, 77th Congress, 1st Session. Jumping bureaucratic hoops, the Democrats introduced the Act as H.R. 1776 to underscore its patriotic aspects.

\(^32\) This struck the British particularly hard. For the discussions between the United States and Great Britain on this issue, see, Memorandum of Conversation Between Sumner Welles and Alexander Cadogan, August 9, 1941. *FRUS, 1941 vol. 1*, p. 351. For the complete text of the Lend-Lease agreements presented to both Great Britain and the Soviet Union, see Edward R. Stettinius, Jr. *Lend-Lease: Weapon for Victory* (New York: Macmillan, 1944), pp. 340-343. For the Article VII debate, see, Gardner, *Sterling-Dollar*, pp. 54-68.
State, Dean Acheson, dismissed any such solution as “wholly impossible” and of no interest to the United States; repayments would have to come in policy concessions. As Hull informed the President in April 1942, “compensation will, to a large extent, consist of cooperation in the attainment of the basic objectives in the economic field, envisaged in the Atlantic Charter.” What he meant was that the cosmetic exceptions that Churchill had managed to insert into the Charter were unsustainable, as the Prime Minister likely knew. The scope of American plans did not allow for such concessions. This view reflected the often overlooked fact that to Roosevelt’s generation, it was not only the fascists and the communists who were deemed fundamentally un-American in thought and deed; it was the British as well. As Kimball points out, to Americans, Britain “epitomized much of what was wrong with the world.” Britain’s wrongs were among the many injustices Americans set out to right as they designed the new order.

In 1942, Morgenthau and White began outlining a complete reformation of the international financial order to include the Fund, the Bank, and free trade ideals. Publicly, they were aided by officials from the Treasury and State departments who had begun inundating newspapers and journals with articles explaining the need for changes to currency and trade policies and for American leadership in the world. Domestically, the

33 Hull to Roosevelt, April 29, 1942, FDRL, President’s Secretary’s File, Confidential File, Lend-Lease.
35 One of the earliest American draft plans for a postwar economic order was commissioned by Secretary Morgenthau shortly after the attack on Pearl Harbor. Completed by Harry Dexter White and his staff in the spring of 1942 as the “Suggested Plans for a United Nations Stabilization Fund and a Bank for Reconstruction of the United and Associated Nations,” it called for a strong American role in establishing international institutions, protecting currencies and credit systems, and establishing free international trade.
policy had the backing of key members of the U.S. Senate as well. In March 1944, Harry Truman (D-MO), Elbert Thomas (D-UT), and Hartley Kilgore (D-WV) sponsored a popular resolution arguing that “enduring peace” depended on the “abandonment of political nationalism and economic imperialism and autarchy.” The resolution declared America the “nominated nation” and its purpose to be the establishment of a “progressive future for ourselves and for the world at large.”36 Few seemed to doubt “that the world’s peoples readily would embrace the liberal American vision that would redound to their benefit.”37 As Morgenthau wrote to White, these economic initiatives would reveal whether the Soviet Union was “going to play ball with the rest of the world on external matters, which she [had] never done before and [if] England [was] going to play with the United Nations or [if she was] going to play with the Dominions.”38 Americans hoped that answers to these questions would come at the United Nations Monetary and Financial Conference scheduled for July of that year in Bretton Woods, New Hampshire, and at the Dumbarton Oaks conference set to convene for discussions on the United Nations in Washington, D.C. later that fall.

The delegates from the forty-four countries who met at Bretton Woods sought agreements on sustainable long-term solutions to the problems plaguing the international


36 *Congressional Record*, 90th Congress, 1944, pp. 2299-2300.
37 Miscamble, *From Roosevelt to Truman*, p. 27.
economic system. In his conference-opening speech, Roosevelt summed up the attendees’ mission, announcing that “commerce is the lifeblood of a free society. We must see to it that the arteries which carry that blood stream are not clogged again.” This speech captured the American anticipation that at war’s end, liberalization and interdependence rather than preferentialism and nationalism would be the prime drivers of the international economy. It also implied that even restrictive, one-party states would be expected to initiate processes of liberalization and to abandon discriminatory policies of monopolism and monopsony when it came to international trade. This was what Roosevelt meant when he emphasized that these nations were gathered for the work of a “free society.”

The Administration envisioned that its goals could be achieved through the establishment of new institutions that would promote regulation and cooperation on currency exchange, development, and trade. The Final Act of the United Nations Monetary and Financial Conference agreed upon at Bretton Woods outlined such mechanisms in the form of the IMF and the IBRD. The primary aim of the proceedings was to ensure that all participants would adopt monetary policies with controlled exchange rates in which their currency would be tied to the U.S. dollar which in turn would be tied to gold. The dollar would take on the role played by gold under the pre-war

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39Roosevelt’s message to the conference was delivered by the State Department’s Warren Kelchner who also served as the conference’s Secretary General, “Roosevelt Appeal for Unity Starts Money Parley,” The New York Times, July 2, 1944. For the President’s message in its entirety, see “Message of the President,” The New York Times, July 2, 1944.
system, in effect making it the world’s currency. The IMF was created to assist countries with loans to cope with short-term balance of payment problems resulting from the war, to restore currency convertibility, and to bring an end to nations’ irresponsible practices of currency devaluations. In contrast, the purpose of IBRD was to provide long-term aid for reconstruction projects in devastated and less advanced countries for the sake of sustainable world welfare and peace. Economic stability, Americans believed, fostered political freedoms and curtailed nationalistic and ideological radicalism.

As the war entered its final year, the United States was economically healthier and wealthier than any nation. In 1944 Americans were producing almost fifty percent of the world’s goods. It was no surprise, therefore, that these new economic organizations were American designed and American-led. Anything else would have been inopportune if not impossible. In the Bretton Woods negotiations, this financial supremacy allowed Washington to secure for itself – over only muted protests from the other powers – virtual control of the distribution of finances to countries in need. This did not mean that the U.S. would singlehandedly determine the appropriation of funds, but rather that it was the only power with the influence necessary to veto aid or any change to the organizational structures. The Administration may have frequently insisted that these new institutions be “financial institutions run by financial experts” and executed “wholly independent of

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42 The United States’ insistence on twenty-eight percent of the quota in the IMF and thirty-one percent in the Bank was not enough to completely control the direction of the international economic order, but it made the U.S. the only power able to veto any decision suggested by other powers, since Fund decisions required a four fifths support to ensure approval. On this, see, Georg Schild, *Bretton Woods and Dumbarton Oaks*, (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1995), pp. 117-122.
political connection,” – a position advocated by Morgenthau during his Senate Committee testimony on the agreements – but that was a simplified view. The Bretton Woods system had obvious financial advantages for American industry. Elimination of trade barriers would lead to flourishing exports, particularly in the immediate postwar era as other nations struggled to rebuild. Perhaps more significantly, Bretton Woods was a sign of the supranational American-led order that was being built.

In this context, New Left historians have traditionally viewed Bretton Woods as nothing more than an extension of the open door policy, a vehicle to establish American world hegemony over the flow of money and trade and to gain unrestricted access to the closed Russian market. Joyce and Gabriel Kolko, for example, have insisted that it was the United States’ primary goal to create a world where *American* business “could trade, operate, and profit without restrictions anywhere.” Such an explanation, however, overlooks both political and practical factors. Bretton Woods’ emphasis was on multilateralism, not on strict self-interest; its creation of a liberalized international economic order was not a zero-sum game. It did not achieve American economic success at the expense of others, but was designed to reinforce the financial strength of all its members. This was the purpose behind the elimination of preferential economic blocs

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such as the Ottawa System. Moreover, the system was neither aimed at socialist economies nor was it, contrary to the argument of scholars like Fred Block and Thomas Paterson, the first step in an aggressive Cold War policy. Raymond Mikesell – one of the chief economists present at Bretton Woods – explained that American postwar planners confidently believed that a way could be found “whereby nations with capitalistic, socialistic, and ‘mixed’ economies could function together.” In fact, negotiators went to great lengths to create a system that included the Soviet Union. Americans believed that an “orderly world trading system required the cooperation of the Soviet Union and that all countries would benefit by the establishment of such a system.”45

Eventually, as described in chapter four, the Soviet Union opted out of participating in the Fund and the Bank, but a careful reading of the American delegation minutes does not – much in contrast to the preparation of the Marshall Plan three years later – indicate that they envisioned or prepared for such an outcome. In fact, the chief Soviet negotiator, M.S. Stepanov, did not give them any reason to believe so. The negotiations reveal differences of opinion among American and Soviet economists, the most extensive of which concerned the Soviet demand for a status equal to Great Britain’s in the new system. These differences, however, never seemed sufficient cause for the Soviet Union to abandon the agreement. Throughout the conference Stepanov was in close contact with Moscow, ensuring that Stalin and Molotov were well informed of the progress. This only furthered Americans’ belief that Moscow would ratify the

treaty. On the final day of the conference, Stepanov praised the American delegation’s flexibility, applauded how the members had “successfully worked out draft agreements,” and “appealed to the Conference to accept the Final Act.” For his part, Morgenthau declared that going forward, “the only enlightened form of national self-interest lies in international accord.” Optimism in both the American and Soviet camp was high when the conference concluded on July 22.

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Negotiations over the establishment of an international security organization to replace the League of Nations began shortly after the conclusion of the economic process at Bretton Woods. The meetings took place in three stages, starting in August 1944 and concluding in the summer of 1945. The first conference was held in Washington D.C., at Dumbarton Oaks, the second in the Crimea at the Three-Power Meeting at Yalta, and the third in San Francisco as the war in Europe was coming to a close. In the United States hopes for the postwar order were succinctly captured in the plain Midwestern language of Wendell Willkie, the Republican whom Roosevelt had defeated in the presidential election of 1940. In One World, his travelogue about his 1942 whirlwind tour of Europe, North Africa, Latin America, Russia, and Asia, Willkie delivered a passionate American

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46 According to Mikesell, Stepanov’s constant need to confer with Moscow was a source of some frustration for the other delegations, because it delayed negotiations, adding a full extra three days to the conference. At least this constant communication makes it clear that the eventual Soviet rejection of the Bretton Woods agreement was not because Stepanov had acted outside the scope of Moscow’s wishes. See Mikesell’s, “Negotiating at Bretton Woods,” pp. 104-106; The Bretton Woods Debates: A Memoir, pp. 35-38.

account of a world free of imperialism and dependency. The book made its readers feel, as the British Ambassador to Washington cabled home, “that America is rising to the height of its material and spiritual power...[and] that a missionary world task is before the United States which the nations are eagerly and desperately expecting it to fulfill.” A year later in An American Program, Willkie summed up this mission when he announced that Americans “are fighting a war for freedom; we are fighting a war for men’s minds. This means that we must encourage men’s just aspirations for freedom not only at home but everywhere in the world.”

The ideal of Willkie’s “one worldism” was one of the driving spirits of American postwar policy under Roosevelt and later Truman who, shortly before Dumbarton Oaks, replaced Henry Wallace as FDR’s running mate on the November ticket. Largely selected because he was acceptable to all, Truman was also a strong internationalist. In January 1944 at the United Nations Forum in Philadelphia, Senator Truman spoke of the need for a “world organization to ensure that the ‘four freedoms’ shall be not only freedoms for the United Nations but a heritage for all peoples of the world.” He was convinced that “history has bestowed on us that solemn responsibility.” The responsibility to save the world from itself rested with the America, he argued six months later. In words that could have been Wilson’s, he asked if Americans did “not owe it to our children, to all

mankind…to be sure these catastrophes do not engulf the world a third time. This is America’s destiny.”⁵¹ Formally endorsing Roosevelt’s plans for the war and beyond, he argued “that some good can come out of this war is [sic] that we are willing to assume the obligations God intended for us to take…I believe God Almighty intended that this nation take its rightful place.”⁵² The covenant that made America exceptional was alive and well.

In August, Under Secretary of State Edward Stettinius, Jr. led the U.S. delegation at Dumbarton Oaks where representatives from the U.S., Great Britain, the Soviet Union, and China gathered to begin exploratory talks on the proposed United Nations.⁵³ The conference was the first collective attempt by the members of the Grand Alliance to establish an effective postwar security order. In D.C., the stakes were viewed as high. On the Senate floor, Joseph Ball (D-MN) proclaimed that the “peace of the world and of these United States depended on American membership.” Others opposed the talks, but

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⁵¹ Harry Truman, “Flag Day Speech in Toledo, OH, Jun. 14, 1944,” HSTL, Harry S. Truman Papers, Senator and Vice President Collection, Box 285. Prior to this speech, Truman had rejected the first version of the so-called Connally Resolution, named after Senator Tom Connally (D-TX), which had called for the U.S. to join other “free nations in the establishment of and maintenance of international authority with power to prevent aggression and preserve the peace.” Truman rejected it, because he did not believe it went far enough. He did join 84 other Senators in supporting an amended version of the resolution that placed greater responsibility on the U.S. Senate to act in world affairs. For Truman’s comments on the Senate floor, see Congressional Record 89, 1943, p. 8993. The full text of the Connally Resolution can be found at http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/decade10.asp (accessed, October 23, 2012). See also, Tom Connally, I am Tom Connally (New York: Thomas Crowell, 1954), pp. 263-264.


⁵³ While all three powers expected that Chiang Kai-Shek’s China would play a major part in the creation of the U.N. as well, the Soviet Union’s neutrality pact with Japan led them to them to refuse active talks with China. As a result, only the American, British, and Russian delegates conducted the first phase of the conference from August 21 to September 28, 1944. A second phase involving the Americans, the British, and Chinese took place from September 29 to October 7, 1944. Appalled at their exclusion, Chinese diplomats leaked information to New York Times’ reporter James Reston, outlining the original American and Soviet plans. For more on this, see Robert Divine, Second Chance: The Triumph of Internationalism in America During WWII (Antheneum, 1967), p. 221.
saw the risks as equally high. Ohio Senator Robert Taft feared that U.S. membership in any international order would be the beginning of the end for the republic. Harold Burton (R-OH) opposed the talks as well. He worried, on the other hand, that absent a strong social and humanitarian agreement, the talks might revert to a plan intended to “dominate the world with three or four other men representing great powers.”

The primary conference objective was, as the *Washington Post* defined it, “the heading off of a Third World War.” In an effort to fulfill that goal, the main topics of early discussion concerned the structure, membership, and voting process of the General Assembly as well as the Security Council. Within days, disagreements on these matters threw the United Nations’ future into doubt. In the Assembly, Stalin demanded seats for each of the Soviet Union’s republics, 16 in all. In the Council, he insisted on veto power for all permanent members in all instances. Washington rejected both demands. Their early planning had called for a one-nation-one-vote structure in the Assembly to ensure institutional equality, a concern Stalin would not permit. Even more worrisome to Stettinius, though, was Stalin’s insistence on veto power even in disputes involving a nation’s own actions. As Roosevelt explained to Stalin in a note hastily composed mid-conference, Moscow’s demands undermined the legitimacy and the equal opportunity of the United Nations. But Stalin would not budge. Fearing the worst, the American delegation decided that a solution should be postponed until further discussions could be held. These different expectations for the U.N. highlighted the substantial differences

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regarding the postwar world that existed between Moscow and Washington. While Stalin viewed the United Nations strictly in security terms, the Americans were seeking a far more egalitarian international organization.57

The likelihood of disagreement was evident in the “tentative proposals” each power submitted in advance of the conference. Stettinius’ delegation arrived with a highly progressive agenda that emphasized new international responsibilities and order, included strong emphases on social and economic fields, and championed human rights. In contrast to this principled agenda, Soviet and British proposals were conservative, seeking only to deal with issues deemed vital to immediate postwar cooperation. No wonder, then, that both nations balked at the American proposal to,

[make it]the duty of each member of the organization to see to it that conditions prevailing within its jurisdiction do not endanger international peace and security and, to this end, to respect the human rights and fundamental freedoms of all its people and to govern in accordance with the principles of humanity and justice. Subject to the performance of this duty, the Organization should refrain from intervention in the internal affairs of any of its members.58

Washington, in other words, was proposing an organization in which a member’s inability to preserve internal tranquility and rights could lead to the organization’s intervention. There is little doubt that a Charter proposing such high-minded ideals would have been difficult to get U.S. Senate approval but the vision was telling of America’s

58 Tentative Proposals, July 18, 1944, FRUS 1944, vol. I, pp. 653-670. See also, U.S. Department of State, Postwar Planning, pp. 595-606. The British plan was slightly less emphatic, suggesting the organization acquire a role in “guarding the right of man to seek his freedom, and [support] increase in the well-being of human society.” FRUS, 1944, vol. I, p. 671.
historical desire to support individual freedoms and to dominate the postwar order. In any event, unlike the Americans, neither London nor Moscow saw global peace as something tied to principles of “human rights” and “fundamental freedoms.” Europeans had seen too much death and mayhem to merit such unlimited faith in the natural progress of mankind. They would rather protect what they had than risk further costs on an American illusion. Given the imperialist nature of both powers they also presumably felt that they had much to lose. A frustrated Stettinius briefed Roosevelt that no immediate solution on human rights would be forthcoming in lieu of the obstinacy shown by the other two. He compromised for now with a heavily watered down reference to rights—a reference that did not stand alone, but was second to social and economic cooperation—which stated that “the Organization should facilitate solutions of international economic, social, and humanitarian problems and promote respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.” The statement paid lip service to the principle, but much to the State Department’s frustration, it left the issue unresolved.

The elimination of the responsibility to defend human rights, however, was overshadowed by the debate over voting procedures which threatened the entire United Nations project. Coupled with Moscow’s abandonment of the Poles during the concurrent Warsaw uprising, Stalin’s apparent insistence on the right to dictate the future of Bulgaria, Romania, and Hungary, and his refusal to provide future independence for the Baltic states, the Soviet veto demand appeared particularly worrisome to the Americans.


60 From Edward Stettinius, Jr. Diary, September 21, 1944, in *FRUS*, vol. I, pp. 831-834
A frustrated Hull confided to Ambassador Harriman in Moscow that he had begun to wonder “whether Stalin and the Kremlin have determined to reverse their policy of cooperation with their Western allies.”61 It was a strong statement, especially considering Hull had heavily championed American-Soviet cooperation since the Moscow Conference in the fall of 1943.

Dumbarton Oaks came to a close in the first week of October with a blueprint for further negotiations and a rather weak statement of principles. Americans had presented their ideals, and Moscow had rejected them. Allen Drury, a reporter with many connections in the Senate, echoed the sentiment felt by many when in his diary he wrote:

> Out of that big house in Georgetown has finally come the Dumbarton Oaks Agreement, the “suggestions” for a “United Nations Security Organization.” Such timid minds, these were, so petty and so small. Apparently afraid to formulate a really strong world body, they have been content to propose instead a method for organizing international chaos in the most respectable manner. It probably deserves to pass the Senate, for it is apparently the best the frightened little men who run the world can manage.62

Like so many others, Drury did not believe this lived up to the dreams of the Atlantic Charter. Many Senators were also appalled at the Allies’ unwillingness to cooperate. “It would be pointless,” Burton Wheeler (D-MN) confided to Drury at the end of the year, “for the President to send the Dumbarton Oaks proposals to the Senate unless Britain and Russia changed their present policies in Europe.” Ball agreed, claiming that if “present

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61 Secretary of State to U.S. Ambassador (Harriman), September 20, 1944, FRUS 1944, vol. IV, p. 991. Harriman was not surprised. He had warned that the Soviet Union was far more independent than the President and Hull anticipated. See, The Ambassador in the Soviet Union (Harriman) to the Secretary of State, September 20, 1944. Ibid., pp. 992-998.

62 Drury, diary entry October 8, 1944, Senate Journals, p. 286.
unilateral decisions by the Allied nations in the liberated areas of Europe continues, it may do irreparable damage to the principles of international collaboration.”

As it was, opposition to internationalism never rediscovered the strength of the interwar era. The most vocal opponent, Robert Taft, in a 1943 speech before the American Bar Association had called for a resurgence of exemplarism. He rejected turning over any American sovereignty to a “Worlditania” and dismissed any plans that “may appeal to do-gooders who regard it as the manifest destiny of America to confer the benefits of the New Deal on every Hottentot.” By late 1944 Taft’s was a minority position. Roosevelt and Truman carried the election four weeks after Dumbarton Oaks. The Nation was quick to emphasize that “the elections have announced to the world that 1944 is not 1920.” Republican Senator Arthur Vandenberg agreed. In early 1945 he, in a powerful speech, repudiated his isolationist views on America's role in the world endorsing Roosevelt's postwar plans. Given his status in the GOP, The New Republic's assertion that Vandenberg's turn-around represented a “turning point in world affairs” hardly seemed an exaggeration. Domestic opposition to the U.N. and to American global leadership was by early 1945 nothing more than a fringe element in U.S. politics.

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Despite the election victory, the Roosevelt Administration remained acutely aware of discontent at home. Shortly before he departed for Yalta in February of 1945, the

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63 Drury, diary entry December 20, 1944, Senate Journals, p. 263. For a particularly scathing critique of Moscow’s foreign policies towards the Baltic states, see, the speech by Alexander Wiley (D-WI), Congressional Record 90th Congress, 1944, pp. 7892-7894.
President warned that the United States needed its allies in war and in peace. He claimed that “the nearer we come to vanquishing our enemies the more we inevitably become conscious of differences among the victors. We must not let those differences divide us and blind us to our more important common and continuing interests in winning the war and building the peace.” At the same time, he remained committed to his beliefs, insisting that while

…the statement of principles in the Atlantic Charter does not provide rules of easy application to each and every one of this war-torn world's tangled situations… – it is an essential thing – to have principles toward which we can aim. And we shall not hesitate to use our influence- and to use it now—to secure so far as is humanly possible the fulfillment of the principles of the Atlantic Charter. We have not shrunk from the military responsibilities brought on by this war. We cannot and will not shrink from the political responsibilities which follow in the wake of battle.65

Perhaps Roosevelt never recognized the incompatibility of these two visions. Fulfilling the principles of the Atlantic Charter was always likely to cause discord among the allies. He likely hoped his personal relationship with Stalin would smooth over the policy differences that had arisen at Dumbarton Oaks and more generally over Europe’s future.66 Roosevelt’s confidence in his diplomatic persuasiveness in one-on-one situations was both a great strength and a great weakness. In Stalin, Roosevelt saw a vital wartime ally and a leader he deemed an essential partner in the postwar world. He never quite understood that Stalin was not a normal statesman. He never understood that the

66 During the Dumbarton Oaks Conference, Roosevelt had similarly attempted to use personal diplomacy to convince the Soviet representative that Moscow’s demands on the Security Council voting procedure were unacceptable. In the middle of the Conference, he invited Gromyko to the White House for a personal meeting. For more on this, see Stettinius, diary entry September 8, 1944, The Diaries of Edward Stettinius, pp. 129-132; Meeting with Ambassador Gromyko in the President’s Bedroom, September 8, 1944, FRUS 1944, vol. I, pp. 784-787.
“symbiosis of imperial expansion and ideological proselytism” reinforced by Marxist
globalism did not make Stalin a man with whom normal pacts could be reached.67

American support for self-government and independence, ideals Washington
considered essential for the sustainability and respectability of the U.N. was the gravest
example of this long-term irreconcilability between the great powers. At Yalta, the
primary concern in this regard was the future of the territories and peoples soon to be
liberated from Axis occupation and those held under mandate by the soon to be extinct
League of Nations. To emphasize the Alliance’s support for the Atlantic Charter,
Roosevelt pressed Churchill and Stalin to sign The Declaration on Liberated Europe,
which guaranteed the independence of all occupied European nations. The signatories
promised support for democracies “through free elections of governments responsive to
the will of the people.” Moscow at first viewed the Declaration with suspicion, but as
Molotov later relayed, the language mattered little; the significant factor was, in Stalin’s
words, simply “the correlation of forces.” In Eastern Europe, that correlation strongly
favored the communists.68 FDR likely understood these practical limitations; however,
after the negative domestic reaction to Stalin’s positioning in Eastern Europe during the
second half of 1944, having Moscow on record as supporting democratic principles
granted Roosevelt some needed political cover.

The Declaration’s principles were tied to American support for decolonization, an
issue that had been on FDR’s agenda since 1941. Embodied in the nation’s own

67 Zubok and Pleshakov, Inside the Kremlin’s Cold War, pp. 3-6.
68 Declaration on Liberated Europe, FRUS, The Conferences at Malta and Yalta, 1945, pp. 977-978. See
anticolonial heritage, support for independence movements was part of America’s historical and cultural consciousness. But, in practice, Americans were ambivalent about self-government. Ideologically, they heralded principles of freedom and independence, and yet, as Brad Simpson shows, Americans had rarely conceded self-government as a right. In 1940, the German-American theologian Paul Tillich articulated this view, declaring that the responsibility of independence “should be reserved for those who are able to carry it.” Echoing Jefferson’s thought on blacks and Native Americans, noted in chapter two, Tillich insisted that “it is by no means a deprivation of Freedom and full humanity if the large majority of people are excluded from political self-determination.”

Not everybody was ready for the responsibility that came with independence and self-government. Roosevelt concurred. In a press conference with the Negro Newspaper Publishers Association (NNPA), he explained that while Americans endorsed national self-determination, there were people “completely incapable of self-government…You have got to give them some education first. Then you have got to better their health and their economic position.”⁶⁹ A year later, in 1945, he warned that in “a democratic world, as in a democratic Nation, power must be linked with responsibility, and obliged to defend and justify itself within the framework of the general good.”⁷⁰

This support for tutelage, however, could not have disguised the significance FDR placed on self-determination as a principle. In the spring of 1944, Hull explained to

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⁷⁰ Franklin D. Roosevelt, “Message on the State of the Union, January, 11, 1945.”
Anthony Eden that Washington’s expectation was that the “United Nations [would] assume a special responsibility” and that it would be its “duty and purpose [my italics]…to cooperate fully with the peoples of such areas in order that they might become qualified for independent national status.” In July, he repeated these demands to Richard Law, the British Minister of State, highlighting that the world’s future peace and prosperity depended on “all nations having special relationships with backward peoples” proceeding “with an awakening and a general forward movement relating to more opportunities, more facilities, [and] more encouragement” for these peoples. Colonial powers should follow the “course and policy of the United States in the Philippines.”

Hull’s comments followed in the wake of remarks the President had leveled against British imperial policy in Gambia earlier that year. Denouncing London’s policy as nothing more than “exploitation,” Roosevelt lamented the complete absence of “education whatsoever,” as well as Britain’s refusal to support local agriculture. Once up and running, FDR wanted the U.N. to inspect and report on colonial powers, making sure to “let all the world know” the injustices of their rule. In a 1944 Memorandum to the President on the Far East, Hull pushed for “early, dramatic, and concerned announcements…making definite commitments to the future of the regions of Southeast Asia.” Americans should call for “specific dates when independence or complete self-government will be accorded…steps to be taken to develop native self-rule…[and a] pledge for economic autonomy and equality of economic treatment.” It was evidence that

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Americans had linked permanent peace with freedom, human rights, and independence. “We believed that we were taking the long-range view, and that a lasting peace in the Pacific was of greater ultimate benefit to Britain, France, and the Netherlands – as well as to the whole world – than the possible immediate benefits of holding on to colonies,” Hull insisted.73

Based on these views of the postwar world, the Department of State developed plans for an International Trusteeship Administration (ITA) – later renamed the International Trusteeship Council (ITC) – to carry forward and apply the provisions of the Atlantic Charter. The purpose was to ensure U.N. supervision of nations held in trust, guaranteeing that they were led toward “preparation and education…for self-government,” that their inhabitants were “protected against exploitation,” and that any form of “forced labor” was abolished. Unlike the Mandatory System at the end of the World War I, the ITA was intended to carry out continuous inspections with observers monitoring and reporting any violations, it was to secure the “establishment of free commerce for citizens and states, and “the promotion of equality of economic opportunity consistent with the safeguarding of the interest of local inhabitants.” Furthermore, inhabitants were to have the right to “petition directly…to the [Security] Council.”74 This latter right was significant, because American plans for the Security Council at this stage still aimed to suspend veto power for permanent members against which a complaint was brought, thereby providing trustees an avenue for a hearing if so requested and action if so decided by the Council.

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74 Department of State, *Postwar Foreign Policy Preparation*, pp. 481-482, 606-607.
Trusteeship plans had been on the American agenda leading up to Dumbarton Oaks, but were removed at the request of the Joint Chiefs of Staff on military grounds.\textsuperscript{75} By Yalta, however, the military situation had improved enough for the topic to reemerge. Here it fell to Stettinius, now Secretary of State after Hull had resigned due to ill health in November 1944, to present these visions to Stalin and Churchill. The Prime Minister’s reaction was predictable. Accounts vary slightly on Churchill’s response, but according to one eye-witness the Prime Minister flew into a rage. Interrupting Stettinius, Churchill yelled that he would “not have one scrap of British territory flung into [trusteeships]. He continued, “I will have no suggestion that the British Empire be put into the dock and examined by everybody to see whether it is up to their standard.”\textsuperscript{76} According to Churchill, the Atlantic Pact had never signaled a willingness to surrender any part of the British Empire. A 1942 diary entry by Vice-President Henry Wallace, however, implies that Churchill knew better. Referencing a conversation with FDR, Wallace wrote that the President insisted the Atlantic Charter “applied to the Pacific as well as to the Atlantic [and] that Churchill thought it applied to a wider area [too] until he got mixed up in the Indian trouble.”\textsuperscript{77} Publicly as well, FDR clarified that the “Atlantic Charter covered not

\textsuperscript{75} For the original State Department Trusteeship plans, see “Arrangements for Territorial Trusteeships, July 6, 1944,” State Department, \textit{Postwar Policies}, pp. 606-607. For the Joint Chiefs Request to postpone talks with the Soviet and the British on this, see General George C. Marshall, Chief of Staff of the United States Army, to the Secretary of State” August 3, 1944, \textit{FRUS 1944}, vol. 1, pp. 699-703.


\textsuperscript{77} Wallace, \textit{The Price of Vision}, pp. 126-128. The reference to “Indian trouble” refers to the launch of the 1942 August Movement across India which had drastically stepped up pressure on London for independence.
only the Atlantic but the whole world.” Echoing this statement, a cartoon in *The New York Times* depicted the President wrapping the Charter’s scroll around the world with a caption making clear that it applied “to all humanity.”78

After Churchill’s outburst, Stettinius made it clear that there were no plans to force the issue of independence in existing empires, but that territorial trusteeship would apply only to existing League of Nations’ mandates, territories detached from the enemy, and territories that might be placed under trusteeship voluntarily by the states responsible for their administration. This statement assuaged Churchill enough that he agreed to accept the trusteeship plan. Perhaps he deceived himself into believing that support for independence could be contained outside of the British Empire, despite the fact that he had now in effect authorized support for all mandates to gain independence. Whatever the British government believed – or hoped – American pressure throughout the war ought to have made it clear that U.N.-defined responsibilities for territories held in trust would naturally be expected to apply to colonies as well.79

The British were hardly the only ones deceiving themselves. Roosevelt left Yalta brimming with optimism. In addition to the agreement on trusteeship matters, the Big Three had agreed on an April date for the San Francisco Conference to formally create the United Nations, on the principled matter of Eastern Europe’s future, and on a rough timeline for the Soviet Union’s entry into Pacific War. Upon his return to Washington, Roosevelt hailed the Yalta Protocol. Addressing a joint session of Congress, he declared

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that the peace would “be based on the sound principles of the Atlantic Charter.” Harry Hopkins summarized these feelings, claiming that after Yalta, we “really believed in our hearts that this was the dawn of a new day we had all been praying for…that we had won the first great victory of the peace – and by ‘we’ I mean all of us, the whole civilized human race.” On relations with the Soviets, he believed that they “had proved that they could be reasonable and far-seeing, and there wasn’t any doubt in the mind of the president or any of us that we could… get along with them peacefully for as far into the future as any of us could imagine.”

Events proved Hopkins and Roosevelt wrong. So, was the President misleading the public into believing that the difficulties of the fall were now a thing of the past? Or was he perhaps simply trying to buy time? Given that the Senate was likely to debate and vote on the Bretton Woods Agreements and a yet to be completed United Nations Charter before year’s end, FDR certainly had reason to exaggerate the state of affairs. It is also possible, of course, that the President truly believed that the agreements reached meant the Soviet Union and Great Britain would play by the American designed rules for the postwar order. Unfortunately, Roosevelt’s death shortly after Yalta leaves us with few answers to these questions. What is clear is that he vastly misjudged the incompatibility of the Yalta agreement with the continued existence of the Soviet Union as an ideological force and Great Britain as an imperial nation. An Americanized world based on the Atlantic Charter could not co-exist alongside these two powers.

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In the aftermath of Yalta, the Administration stepped up the domestic campaign in support of the Yalta Protocol and the United Nations. The State Department’s newly created Division of Public Liaison (DPL) filled the media with inspiring stories and worked with interested private groups – from church groups to organized labor – to promote the values of the new organization, including its human rights emphasis. A simultaneous campaign, championed by the eloquent Dean Acheson, backed the Bretton Woods system. In need of atonement for 1919, American officials presented the new international order as assurance that the world would measure up to American principles. It was a message the American people were ready to hear. If in December 1941 World War II had been a war for vengeance, it had by 1945 also become a war for righteousness.

On March 15, Roosevelt, speaking to his advisor Charles Taussig, laid out what became his final views on trusteeships. These confirmed and clarified the direction in which his thoughts had always been heading. The President insisted that, French Indo-China and New Caledonia should be taken from France and put under a trusteeship. He said, “well if we can get the proper pledge from France to assume for herself the obligations of a trustee, then I would agree to France retaining these colonies with the proviso that independence was the ultimate goal. Taussig then “asked the President if he would settle for self-government. He said no.” He then “asked him if he would settle for dominion status. “He said no--it must be independence. He said that is to be the policy

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81 For the role played by the DPL, see Oral History Interview with John S. Dickey. HSTL, Oral History Collection; Andrew Johnstone, “Creating a ‘Democratic Foreign Policy’: The State Department’ Division of Public Liaison and Public Opinion, 1944-1953,” Diplomatic History, vol. 35, no. 3 (June 2011), pp. 483-503.
and you can quote me in the State Department."\textsuperscript{82} Given the comparable nature of French Indo-China and British imperial possessions, FDR’s stance did not bode well for European empires in general. Roosevelt had a meeting scheduled with Stettinius and his major advisors on trusteeships for April 19, presumably to clarify his views in advance of the San Francisco conference scheduled to start six days later. That meeting was never held.

Eight days after FDR’s conversation with Taussig, on March 23, the British Embassy informed London of developing American plans that now included having the U.N. “send out technical representatives, doctors, sanitary experts, economists, and social analysts” to investigate conditions in colonies.\textsuperscript{83} Lord Halifax accurately captured the American vision when he told London that the Administration’s promotion of “non-conformist idealism and non-conformist self-interest” is committing “the American nation to economic responsibilities as a world political and military power...[the] widespread belief [exists here] that the world awaits on the United States to give the lead in these matters.”\textsuperscript{84} Accordingly, he believed the U.S. would take a strong anti-colonial stance at the upcoming United Nations Conference.

President Roosevelt was scheduled to deliver the primary address in San Francisco on April 25. To prepare for his biggest stage performance as the postwar

\textsuperscript{82} Memorandum of Conversation [with the President] by the Advisor on Caribbean Affairs, \textit{FRUS United Nations, 1945} vol. I, pp. 121-124.
\textsuperscript{84} Lord Halifax to Anthony Eden, June 16, 1945, \textit{British Documents on Foreign Affairs: Reports and Papers from the Foreign Office Confidential Print}. North America vol. 5, January 1945-December 1945, pp. 105-117, (quotation on p. 113).
leader—and to rejuvenate, the President departed for the Little White House in Warm Springs, Georgia on March 29, 1945. Here Roosevelt held his last press conference on April 5. By his side stood Sergio Osmena, President of the Philippine Commonwealth and of a people about to gain its independence after four decades of American tutelage. His presence sent a clear message to the Europeans: the United States would expect the world to follow its example. A week later, at just before four in the afternoon, Roosevelt suffered a cerebral hemorrhage. He died within the hour. It would be left for others to determine his wishes and policies for the global world order.

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On that day, April 12, at seven in the evening, less than three hours after FDR’s death, Harry Truman took the presidential oath of office. Ahead of him lay an overwhelming task. Roosevelt’s death had shocked the nation and the world. He had “so embodied everyone’s notion of who ‘the president’ was that it seemed incomprehensible that anyone else could be president of the United States,” William Leuchtenburg wrote. Nonetheless, Truman was indeed the President; the future of the postwar world was in his hands. His first official act was to confirm that the San Francisco Conference would go ahead, easing any worries that Roosevelt’s plans would be silenced by his death. On April 16, in his first major policy announcement, the new President, embracing the

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86 For perhaps the most critical analysis of Truman’s character and his lack of preparedness, see Offner, Another Such Victory. A more sympathetic interpretation can be found in Leuchtenburg, In the Shadow of FDR, pp. 1-2.
87 “Statement by the President after Taking the Oath of Office, 12, April, 1945.” HSTL Papers President’s Secretary’s File, Box, 23. According to Stettinius’s diary, Truman made this statement on the Secretary of State’s insistence, see his Diaries of Edward Stettinius, p. 315.
language of American exceptionalism, asserted that the world is looking “to America for enlightened leadership to peace and progress. Such a leadership requires vision, courage and tolerance. It can be provided only by a nation devoted to the highest ideals.”

Nine days later, he opened the San Francisco Conference with a radio address. Asking for God’s guidance, he reminded the delegates that the awesome responsibility of creating a just and free world rested on their shoulders. The public’s hopes were high for the new organization. An elated Stettinius informed Truman of ever increasing public support. An April Gallup poll, showed 83 percent of Americans favored U.S. membership and U.S. global leadership. Even considering the American aversion to international embroilment during the interwar period, there was nothing remarkable about the American people’s affection for the new organization. Largely viewed as the apotheosis of Wilsonianism, the U.N.’s principled ideals of justice, rights, and liberty for mankind were custom-made to the predilections of American opinion.

Despite the public enthusiasm, American officials privately worried about the future of the postwar order. Soviet policies in Europe were causing cracks in the Grand Alliance, particularly the Soviet policy towards Poland, where Moscow had tightened its grip since Yalta. In addition, there were fears that Stalin’s interest in the organization was cooling. Only in the aftermath of Roosevelt’s death did the Soviet leader choose Molotov

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88 Harry Truman, “Address before a Joint Session of Congress, 16, April, 1945.” HSTL, President’s Secretary’s File, Box 23.
89 “Address by Secretary of State Edward R. Stettinius Jr. at the opening of the United Nations Conference, at San Francisco on April 25, 1945.” HSTL, President's Secretary's Files, Box 23.
90 “Stettinius to Truman, April 23, 1945.” HSTL, Harry S. Truman Papers, President’s Secretary’s File, Box 154. For the Secretary’s evaluation of polls see, “Stettinius to Truman, May 7, 1945.” HSTL, Harry S. Truman Papers, President’s Secretary’s File, Box 121.
to head what was otherwise a fairly low-level Soviet delegation traveling to San Francisco. There was growing concern within the Truman Administration that if pressed too hard, the Soviet Union might not sign a charter at all. Like his predecessor, Truman deemed the Soviet Union’s participation in the organization vital for its success. His level of concern was evident when he made it a point to publicly announce that Molotov would be meeting him in Washington on his way to California to pay his respects to the dead President and to reinforce the “earnest cooperation in carrying forward plans for formulating the international organization as laid down by President Roosevelt.”

Historians’ discussions of the San Francisco conference traditionally focus on the disputes over voting procedures, regional security alliances, and Polish representation. Important as these issues were, the debates over self-government and human rights provide greater insight into America’s ideological vision for the world. Although technically part of separate discussions at the Conference, Americans demonstrated that they clearly viewed both self-government and human rights as closely linked. But negotiations proved difficult. On the issue of self-government, the American delegation was caught between a rock and a hard place. At one extreme, the European imperial powers opposed any charter language that assigned the U.N. a role in leading territories toward independence. In contrast, the Soviet Union and China, two powers hoping to gather support across the Far East, called for the immediate independence of all colonized territories. As described above, the American support for trusteeships fell somewhere in the middle of these two positions. Washington supported independence and self-

91 "White House Press Release, April 14, 1945." HSTL, Harry S. Truman Papers, President’s Secretary’s File, Box 55.
government in principle, but was unwilling to rashly back liberation movements unfit for the responsibilities of governance. 92 From the beginning, the American purpose of trusteeships had been to clarify the legal obligations of nations holding territories in trust, ensuring that they would work responsibly for independence under U.N. General Assembly and Security Council influence. Even though Americans still maintained this view at San Francisco, they treaded lightly out of fear that any language unacceptable to Moscow or London might lead their delegations to walk out of the conference. No matter what position they took on these issues, Americans risked “being played for suckers,” as the State Department’s Harley Notter put it.93

The tension between American ideological hopes for the postwar order and the political realities of great power diplomacy became evident in a heated debate among members of the American delegation on May 18. Harold Stassen made the argument that the U.S. ought to support “progressive development toward self-government…[which] might lead toward independence,” but refused to accept the Soviet-Chinese position of outright demands for independence. Charles Taussig, on the other hand, deemed that position unacceptable. Half-hearted support for independence, he insisted, would put Americans on record as supporting European imperialism. Referencing his March 15 meeting with Roosevelt, Taussig argued that anything less than outright support for independence would make a mockery of the dead President’s vision. Linking FDR’s

support for national self-determination with State’s push for human rights amendments, he argued that an American position should not contain shades of grey.\textsuperscript{94} Leo Pasvolsky, one of the State Department’s most skilled officials, found himself somewhere in between these two views. Too “much emphasis on independence as the sole goal was bad,” he argued, but “emphasis on independence [is] our tradition.” Though reluctant to put their weight behind the Europeans, most delegation members—including Arthur Vandenberg, Tom Connally, and John Foster Dulles—leaned toward Stassen’s position. Immediate support for independence, they concluded, would do little for democracy and liberalization in the underdeveloped world. If left to their own devices, poorer countries would merely be susceptible to communism or other ideological visions considered a menacing threat to an American inspired world order. This was not a neo-colonial position developing; it was, as described in the previous chapter, the traditional American perspective of underdeveloped cultures and peoples. It was a perspective that went back at least a century and a half. The development of democracy took time and patience. The Soviet-Chinese position did not allow for that.

In the delegation discussions Isaiah Bowman, a former advisor to Wilson at Versailles and an influential member of the Council on Foreign Relations, captured the dilemma when he stated that the core of the problem was “Russia promising to do one thing and doing another.” Even while the communists spoke of independence, they were contriving domination. Bowman was not alone in his concern; his position reflected a growing view within American political and military circles that the U.S. and the Soviet

\textsuperscript{94} Minutes of the Forty Fifth Meeting, pp. 792-794.
Union would become the two major powers after the war. There would likely be, Bowman concluded, “an inevitable struggle between Russia and ourselves.” Though he hesitated to outline the form and seriousness of that struggle, he cautioned that there was little value to alienating the British and the French. New Jersey Congressman Charles Eaton captured this sentiment most clearly. As he saw it, the basic problem was who was going to be “the masters of the world.” Eaton “did not want Russia in control of the world.” It was as he saw it “a struggle as to whose ideals were going to dominate.”

Secretary of State Stettinius shared Stassen’s view that in a post-war world increasingly dominated by Americans, self-government would often lead naturally to independence “for those who had earned it and indicated the ability to use it.” So as not to appear opposed to freedom, however, he supported a suggestion that the American delegation “dress up” Stassen’s position. At San Francisco, therefore, Americans came down in support of progressive self-government and independence for trusteeships but avoided using similar terminology in any Charter chapter dealing with colonial territories. Unwilling to endanger the entire U.N. project, this was as far as the Americans deemed it pertinent to go. In the final analysis, Stettinius insisted that this middle ground was satisfactory, because there was no doubt “where we stood as a nation…on human rights and self-determination.”

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95 Ibid. p. 797.
96 Ibid. p. 797.
97 Stettinius in part based this argument on the original American proposal for trusteeships. For the details of this original proposal, see, Draft United States Proposals for Trusteeship, April 26, 1945, FRUS vol. I, 1945, pp. 459-460.
Stettinius was not being disingenuous. Historians tempted to read history backwards may argue otherwise, especially given American Cold War support for regimes with deplorable human rights records. However, the Secretary’s view reflected the State Department’s position throughout the war, a position they maintained throughout the conference as well. When the issue of human rights surfaced at San Francisco, only the Americans pressed for human rights to be a central obligation of all members. Aware of the significance attached to the preamble in the U.S. Constitution, Stettinius insisted on placing the issue among the United Nations’ basic foundational purposes.98 As the New York Times reported, the Truman Administration placed human rights “at the heart of the matter” of the new organization.99 To the Americans, they were creating not simply an organization of principles but one concerned with international justice. In his memoirs, Truman recorded that he “felt strongly about the need for a world ‘bill of rights,’ something on the order of our own.” He wanted definite language regarding “human rights and fundamental freedoms”100 and called for the charter to mirror the U.S. Constitution in a manner that assigned each nation a role similar to those held by House and Senate members.101

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98 For the State Department’s recommendations to Truman, see Memorandum by the Secretary of State to President Truman, April 19, 1945, FRUS, 1945, vol. I, pp. 353-355. See also Stettinius to Truman, April 22, 1945. HSTL, President’s Secretary’s File, Box 154.
Despite this presidential support, and strong backing from several American NGOs, the human rights issue was not straightforward even for the American delegation. Stettinius opposed language containing mere generalities and vague hopes, but the American delegation was also very conscious of the need for language that was passable. The issue was complicated even further by Soviet demands that the charter specifically encourage “the right to work and the right to education…without distinction as to race, language, and sex.”"102 While not opposed to such language in principle, Americans were unwilling to only reference these rights. The fear was that somehow this might elevate “work” and “education” above equally pressing rights. Vandenberg made it clear that given the significance of the American Bill of Rights, he “would hesitate to pick out one or two of them for special mention,” implying that a statute of defined rights would need to be more detailed. The problem was that U.S. delegates understood the danger of pressing for specific mentions of freedom of speech, religion, assembly and other rights that might caution the Soviet Union to reject the Charter. Under American pressure, Molotov accepted that references to human rights should only be included in the Charter’s preamble while all agreed postponing further discussions on a specific bill of rights for the Assembly to determine once in session.103 In a press conference on May 14, Stettinius declared that it was his “conviction, that the foundation which we are laying here for the economic and social collaboration of nations in the cause of fundamental


103 Speaking to the media, Stettinius hailed this principled agreement on human rights, but declared it too time consuming to obtain an “enumeration of individual and collective rights and freedoms” at this meeting. See “Stettinius Urges World Bill,” New York Times, May 16, 1945.
human rights and freedoms may well prove the most important of all the things we do here for the peace and advancement of the peoples of the world.” He insisted that the “drafting of a code” of rights should be the first task of the new organization.

On June 25, Truman delivered the closing speech at the San Francisco Conference. He praised the delegations’ work and the charter as a “victory against war itself” that “had given reality to the ideal of that great statesman of a generation ago – Woodrow Wilson…Let us not,” he continued, “fail to grasp this supreme chance to establish a world-wide rule of reason – to create an enduring peace under the guidance of God.”

The world now had “a solid structure upon which we can build a better world.” He shared Vandenberg’s view of the Charter as “an emancipation proclamation for the world.” A week later, in front of the U.S. Senate, Truman added that “improvements will come in the future as the United Nations gain experience.” This was only the beginning of a more perfect society of nations. The Senate concurred, ratifying the United Nations Charter 89-2 and the Bretton Woods Agreement 61-19. In celebration, Life magazine published a picture series showing each of the fifty delegates from around the world attaching their signature to the Charter. The Washington Post euphorically compared the achievement to the 1787 Constitutional Convention.

These romanticized views would help create “inflated and unreal” expectations for the United Nations.\textsuperscript{107} The Rooseveltian foreign policy that Truman continued was intended as a New Deal for the world. The institutions and principles intended to promote collective security, stabilize and grow economies, and ensure the protection of individuals through international rules and justice, sought to reshape and redesign the international order along American inspired ideals. Roosevelt was certain that “Americanism…was so very sensible, logical, and practical that societies would adopt those values and systems if only given the chance.” At times, as in the case of Lend-Lease, slight coercion might be needed to ensure that this American agenda succeeded, but Roosevelt considered these legitimate means to an end.\textsuperscript{108}

In retrospect, it seems remarkable that even though the American plans for both Bretton Woods and the United Nations sought to transform the beliefs inherent in the British Empire and the Soviet Union’s communist ideology, there were no serious discussions or considerations among Americans that these plans would lead down an irreconcilable path. As historians, our scholarship is shaped by the evidence available. Sometimes, however, it is the absence of evidence that is most telling. Americans were certainly aware that procedural and technical differences existed between Washington and Moscow, but as Harry Dexter White wrote later, to the best of his recollection no “influential person expressed expectation of the fear that international relations would


\textsuperscript{108} Kimball, \textit{The Juggler}, p. 186.
worsen” after the war. Americans had, they believed, set the world on the path to redemption and on the path to progress. They expected the world to follow that path.

Perhaps the fiery journalist William Henry Chamberlin was right when he charged that American conduct during the war was simply “a depressing compound of profound factual ignorance, naïveté, wishful thinking, and emotional hysteria.” Lord Halifax made the same point – only more eloquently – in a cable to London. The American problem, he argued, was the nation’s permanent tendency to believe in “declarations and blueprints…to cure most of the ills of the world; this naturally leads to a sharp sense of ‘let down’ whenever events refuse to conform to the aspiration of men of good will and generates amongst them a corresponding tendency to blame the outside world… for wantonly putting obstacles in the path of idealistic American statesmen.” 110

In a manner one could expect from a people so immersed in their own ideological vision for the world and so determined to create a novus ordo seclorum after the Second World War, Americans were blind to their own limitations and the applicability of the idealistic programs they had set in motion. They were as of yet “unaware of the extent to which,

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109 Harry Dexter White cited in Georg Schild, Bretton Woods and Dumbarton Oaks, p. 120. White was since accused of having been a Soviet spy. Indications are that his involvements with the Soviets were at the very least inappropriate though as Mikesell later argued a similar view would likely not have been held had White shared the same details with the British or the Canadians. Regardless, there is no indication that White’s efforts at Bretton Woods served any political leader other than Franklin Roosevelt. For a recent and somewhat inconclusive investigation into the allegations against White see, R. Bruce Craig, Treasonable Doubt: The Harry Dexter White Spy Case, (University Press of Kansas, 2004).

given the immediate realities of world politics, they would have to compromise the ideals written into the Charter.”

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When viewed from a distance of more than six decades, the Cold War has an aura of inevitability, an internal narrative logic woven together by political, military, economic, and ideological causes. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, however, conflict was not what Americans anticipated as VE day and VJ day finally arrived. In the summer of 1945, the widely held belief in the United States was that, guided by American moral leadership, the United Nations would become the guarantor of global peace and justice and the unifier of America’s one world vision. Even in that context, the Roosevelt and Truman administrations understood that the new organization’s institutional stratification prevented it from being a perfectly egalitarian congress; the design, functions, and authority of the Security Council reflected the great powers’ understanding that while all nations were equal, some – pace George Orwell’s *Animal Farm* – were more equal than others. Across the United States, however, such concerns of procedure and structure worried few people. Americans trusted that institutional flaws would be corrected in due course and that collaboration in the interest of peace and liberty would abound as the organization matured. Americans largely shared Senator Arthur Vandenberg prophecy that the United Nations would become a “town meeting of the world,” a forum for consensus and cooperation, rather than a place for nationalistic votes and ideological confrontation.¹

Even if the concrete objectives of U.S. leadership and the path forward often remained abstract and vaguely expressed, Americans expected the United Nations to direct global affairs according to American values and on American terms. Mankind’s poor record for utopian undertakings did not dim Americans’ optimism. A *Saturday Evening Post* columnist accurately captured the national sentiment just three weeks after Japan’s surrender. “The history of the New World,” he wrote, “represents a bright page of progress…toward a millennium based on technology and democracy under American inspiration.” To the American “no evil on earth is incurable… [he believes] that at last the decisive hour has struck to redeem the world under American inspiration.” In his Christmas message at the end of 1945, Pope Pius XII added that the “American people have a genius for splendid and unselfish action, and into the hands of America God has placed the destinies of afflicted humanity.”

Widespread as these views were, not everybody shared such sanguine assessments. A few intellectuals, in particular, viewed hopes of “one-worldism” with despondency. Among the most eloquent and influential of these thinkers was Reinhold Niebuhr. A former pacifist and member of the Fellowship of Socialist Christians, Niebuhr had by the Second World War become an unapologetic realist and supporter of the war effort. Unlike the Administration, he chastised notions of excessive optimism for the postwar era. His writings peeled away the layers of American exceptionalism and denounced it as dangerous and misleading. In his most powerful wartime work, *The Children of Light and The Children of Darkness*, Niebuhr derided prophets of an

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integrated peaceful world under an international organization as naïve and blind to the flaws inherent in human nature. No society, he insisted, “not even a democratic one, is great enough or good enough to make itself the final end of human existence.” People’s innate fallibility, he was convinced, exposed any noble vision to rid society of evil and any hope to ensure global freedom from war as mere fantasy. The powers of self-interest and man’s personal ambitions, he deemed, were too pervasive to secure a lasting peace. Utopian international organizations were therefore, by extension, likely to disappoint.³

The influential and respected columnist Walter Lippmann shared many of Niebuhr’s opinions. In 1919, as a young, opinionated writer accompanying Woodrow Wilson to the Paris Peace Conference, Lippmann had hailed the League of Nations as the vehicle to save mankind. By 1945, perhaps suffering from buyer’s remorse, he instead argued that the United Nations’ Charter was out of touch with political reality. The institution’s structures, he believed, were in fundamental conflict with the organization’s lofty ambitions. He argued that postwar collaboration between the members of the Grand Alliance, rather than the pursuit of a utopian world order, represented the world’s best hope for a secure postwar peace.⁴


In hindsight, Niebuhr’s and Lippmann’s dour views of the American dream for the world appear prophetic. Neither the United Nations nor the United States ever lived up to the righteous mission their champions envisioned. Yet such challenges to an Americanized world order remained in the minority. Following the idea of a New Deal for the world, so deeply engrained in the American exceptionalist vision, most deemed it America’s responsibility, in conjunction with the United Nations, to establish a new moral international world order. National debates remained largely confined to the nature of this global duty. Few questioned if the responsibility was America’s. For almost a year and a half after the Second World War ended, this internationalist vision defined the trajectory of U.S. foreign policy. The Truman Administration pushed collaborative efforts for the new society of nations in a genuine effort to eliminate the catalysts of the last two wars from the world. The provision of American global leadership would ensure the reconstruction of the international economic order, global health, international control of atomic energy and weapons, and keep the world safe from war. It was a mission to internationalize Roosevelt’s “Four Freedoms.” The United Nations’ ideals were to become a vehicle for America’s New Deal for the world.

Over time the different ideological visions in Washington and Moscow hampered these global efforts. In Eastern Europe, Germany, the Balkans, the Middle East, Asia, and in the United Nations Security Council, the two new superpowers found themselves at odds. However, even if in hindsight the contours of the Cold War appear clear, in the eighteen months after the Second World War ended, it is important to recognize that the particular ideology and the psychology that defined that fifty-year struggle did not yet
guide or dominate American policy. In 1939, Harry Truman had claimed that the world needed a “moral re-awakening” and that it was “the role of this Great Republic [to] save civilization.” The fulfillment of that prophecy was to come, congressman John Rankin (D-MS) explained at war’s end, by the United States leading the world on a march “to modern progress…into that golden age that Tennyson dreamed of”, when he called for a parliament of man. It was one world not a bifurcated one that America sought; a world based on international collaboration, but on American terms.

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American optimism and the sincerity of one-world collaboration is often absent in accounts of the postwar period. It is testimony to the Cold War’s grip on our understanding of the postwar period that many commentators continue to draw a straight line from early American-Soviet disagreements and discussions in the spring and summer of 1945 to Churchill’s “Iron Curtain” speech a year later, to the Truman Doctrine in 1947, and to American containment policy. This interpretation implies a seamless evolution of a deteriorating superpower relationship and suggests that the American wartime ideas for the postwar world were merely, as Elizabeth Borgwardt recently wrote, “pet projects on the added agenda of a dying president.” Whether scholars blame Moscow or Washington for the Cold War, they often trace the beginning of the Cold War

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6 Born in Mississippi in the late nineteenth-century, Rankin was unsurprisingly an unapologetic racist. In the House he supported segregationist policies and frequently stood in the way of equal protection of blacks, Jews, and Japanese. As was the case for so many Americans over time, and as it indeed had been the case for the nation’s founders, Rankin appears not to have detected any inherent contradictions between his vocal support for a democratic world order and his own support for segregation at home.

to the meetings between President Truman and Soviet Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Molotov in April 1945 and to the meetings at Potsdam between the Big Three in July the same year. Even before the guns fell silent in Europe and Asia, the argument often goes, the Atlantic Charter spirit descended into superpower confrontation.8

The speaking notes Secretary of State Edward Stettinius prepared for Truman in advance of the Molotov-meetings certainly implied that all was not well with the Soviet-American relationship. Stettinius warned the President that the U.S. could not “be party to the formation of a Polish Government which is not representative of the Polish people” and recommended that the President make clear that U.S. diplomats’ lack of access to Eastern European states was unacceptable.9 Ambassador Averell Harriman, in Washington to assist the less experienced Truman in the talks, added that since “the Crimea Conference…the Russians have been greatly disturbed by the fact that for the first time they realized that we are determined to carry out what we said.” As if to emphasize this position, Truman replied that he would make “no concession from American principles or tradition.” He expected liberalism, not tyranny, to rule in Europe. The Yalta agreement, as Truman understood it, was not up for debate.10 In his memoirs, Truman recalled how he dressed down Molotov during the talks and demanded that

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9 “Memorandum for the President: Points to be Raised with Mr. Molotov, April 22, 1945.” HSTL, Harry S. Truman Papers, President’s Secretary’s Files, Box 196 ; “Memorandum for the President, April 23, 1945,” Ibid.
10 Minutes of the Secretary of State’s Staff Committee, April 20, 1945, FRUS, 1945, vol. V. pp. 839-842; Memorandum of Conversation by Charles E. Bohlen, April 20, 1945, FRUS 1945, vol. V; pp. 231-234.
Moscow live up to its Yalta promises. An exasperated Soviet Foreign Minister protested, saying “I have never been talked to like that in my life.” According to Truman’s recollections, his own reply was brusque: “Carry out your agreements and you won’t get talked to like that again.”

This exchange demonstrated the new President’s determination. The available records, however, cast strong doubts regarding the accuracy of Truman’s recollections. The American note taker and interpreter, Charles Bohlen, described Truman’s performance as firm. The comments as the President recalled them, however, are not recorded in either the American or the Soviet minutes; they only appear in memoirs written over a decade later. Indications are, in fact, that the meetings ended on a fairly good note with joint photos being taken of the participants afterward. The Americans, in other words, were not anticipating the coming of the Cold War. Consciously or unconsciously, memoirists often exaggerate the quality of their own performance, of course and in light of the Cold War it was perhaps unsurprising that Truman later attempted to leave the impression that he, from the beginning, had taken a tough stance against Moscow.

Whatever the reason for Truman’s embellished reminiscence of the meetings with Molotov, his memoirs led some scholars to conclude that the U.S. here abandoned FDR’s conciliatory policy toward the Soviet Union. The most unwavering Cold War revisionists

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11 Truman, Memoirs, Years of Decision, vol. I, p. 82.
conclude that the President, backed by an aggressive State Department, was determined to impose his will on the Soviet Union. 13 The use of the atomic bombs against Japan, they believe, was unnecessary to win the war, meaning that Hiroshima and Nagasaki must have served primarily to intimidate Josef Stalin and to warn the Soviets of the potential consequences if they were to step out of bounds in Europe.14

The Potsdam Conference three months later was certainly contentious at times as well but the records imply more collaboration than animosity between the three leaders. As at Dumbarton Oaks, Yalta, and San Francisco, a desire for accord dominated the proceedings. Americans viewed disagreements as temporary and solvable. Truman might have been appalled by reports of Soviet actions in Eastern Europe, but he “felt that Stalin would eventually bow to American pressure” on the issue of Eastern Europe.15 Tense negotiations also took place regarding Germany’s future, but the perception in the American camp was that common ground would be found on both reparations and the international status of the former enemy. In his memoirs, George Kennan labeled these solutions “unreal” and “unworkable.” Nonetheless, they did reflect the President’s and the public’s perception at the time that the new order required international accord; this, of course, meant friendship with Stalin as well. “I like Stalin,” Truman wrote to his wife Bess from Potsdam. “He is straightforward. Knows what he wants and will compromise

14 The revisionist position on the bomb was made popular by Gar Alperovitz’, Atomic Diplomacy. For a damaging critique of this position, see, Samuel J. Walker, “Recent Literature on Truman’s Atomic Bomb Decision: A Search for Middle Ground,” Diplomatic History, vol. 29, no. 2 (April 2005), pp. 311-334.
15 Leffler, For the Soul of Mankind, p. 42.
when he can’t get it.” In his diary Truman showed concern for Stalin’s health. He worried that if “Stalin passes” and “some demagogue on horseback gained control of the efficient Russian military he could play havoc with European peace for a while.”

In the context of the Cold War, these meetings were neither as decisive nor as divisive as some scholars imply. That the Cold War eventually became a reality should not distract from our understanding of the extent to which the U.S. sought postwar cooperation – something its leadership had always deemed vital to the global order they expected to shape – well into 1946. The American Zeitgeist of 1945 stimulated collaboration towards peace, progress, and liberalism. This belief and hope dominated not only policy statements, but also the vast majority of letters and telegrams sent to the Truman White House from American citizens throughout this period. These correspondences show an outpouring of support for postwar reconstruction, modernization, and cooperation. One citizen, for example, praised Truman, hoping that victory would secure the global spread of the “principles and ideas of the President of the United States and the American people.” Many others called for American leadership through the U.N. and encouraged the establishment of some form of democratic world government. The consensus was that people were crying out for American leadership now that the U.S. was “at the summit of the world.” Americans liked Truman because he was “a regular guy” as a cab driver from Washington, D.C. put it and because he was “trustworthy,” and “a man of the people.” At the same time, opinion polls show that Americans expected Truman and Americans to lead in the world. One Gallup poll taken

16 Kennan, Memoirs, pp. 258-260. For Truman’s view of Stalin, see Ferrell, Dear Bess, p. 522; Ferrell, Off the Record, Diary entries from July 17 and 30, 1945, pp. 53, 57-58.
across the United States, Canada, France, Sweden, and Denmark, unanimously concluded that the United States would be the most influential country in “world affairs after the war.” George Gallup reported in early July, a week after the end of the San Francisco Conference, that after “two months in office…a coast to coast check up shows that nearly nine out of every 10 Americans approve of the way Truman is handling his job.” Even taking a natural honeymoon period into account the number was, Gallup explained, unprecedented. It exceeded by three percentage point the national support given to “Roosevelt in a poll on a similar question in January, 1942, shortly after Pearl Harbor attack had rallied the country behind the Administration.”

Reaching conclusions based on letters to the president and understanding the extent to which they are representative of the popular mood is methodologically complex. However, when paired with national polls supporting similar trends and a strong affirmative media outpouring in favor of a leading American presence in the United Nations, they cannot be dismissed as insignificant. By August 1945, a majority of Americans believed that cooperation with the Soviet Union would continue, that the United Nations ought to serve as the sole arbiter of international affairs. Fifty-eight percent of Americans believed the U.N. headquarters should be in the United States. By

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early 1946 that number climbed to seventy percent. The location of the United Nations and the World Bank headquarters in the New York and Washington reflected just how dramatically the center of the world order had switched across the Atlantic. Combined, this reflected the feeling in America that notwithstanding the despair prevalent across the globe, with their guidance, progress for mankind was on the horizon.

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Five days after the Japanese surrender in August, a *New York Times* sketch depicted James Byrnes, the recent replacement for Stettinius as Secretary of State, holding two large doctor’s bags as he smiled toward an image of a bruised and hurting globe. The caption simply read, “Doc Byrnes and patient.” It was one of many public signs that unlike after the First World War, Americans expected responsibilities beyond the end of the fighting. Ensconced in American ideals and backed by American funds, Americans expected United Nations agencies to take the lead role in restoring the liberated areas. Their purpose was to feed the starving, engage in disease eradication programs, to safeguard political and economic fairness and security, and promote human rights.

The International Monetary Fund and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development were central to this vision but the war’s rapid conclusion overtook the pace with which the Bretton Woods organizations could become operational. As a result, many of the wartime United Nations agencies took on the urgent responsibility of helping the world progress from the war’s chaos. As early as the spring of 1943, the United States

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had taken the leading role in organizing United Nations humanitarian aid. Americans sponsored the United Nations Conference on Food and Agriculture that led to the establishment of the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) with a mission statement aimed at defeating global hunger. Americans also took the lead in running and funding the most successful wartime and postwar international relief agency, the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration commonly referred to as UNRRA.20

UNRRA’s ambitiously stated purpose was to “plan, co-ordinate, administer or arrange for the administration of measures for the relief of victims of war in any area under the control of any of the United Nations through the provision of food, fuel, clothing, shelter and other basic necessities, medical and other essential services.”21 Over seventy percent of the more than ten billion dollars UNRRA supplied to nations in despair came from U.S. coffers. The vast majority of this support went to China and Eastern Europe, the areas most violently struck by Axis aggression.22 The American contribution stemmed from a belief that reconstruction of the war-torn nations was essential to shaping a more stable, peaceful, cooperative, and healthy world. “If UNRRA

21 “Agreement for United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration, November 9, 1943” in Documents Pertaining to American Interest In Establishing A Lasting World Peace (Book Department, Army Information School, Carlisle Barracks, PA, 1946). For the extensive developing discussions within the U.S. State Department see, FRUS, 1943, vol. I, pp. 851-1031. These organizations operated under the loose auspices of the nations that had declared war on the Axis and referred to themselves as the United Nations. Unsurprisingly, the operational structures were far more ad hoc in 1943 and 1944 than would be the case after the formal creation of the United Nations in the summer of 1945. Nevertheless, these operations signaled the first examples of the collective effort that Americans expected to lead once the war ended.
should fail, there is grave doubt that any collaboration of the United Nations can survive the test of practical application,” testified UNRRA’s first Director, the former Governor of New York, Herbert Lehman, to the House Committee on Foreign Affairs in 1944.\textsuperscript{23}

Europe was of particular concern to the U.S. In August 1945, a \textit{New York Times} political cartoon showed Death staring across the lands of a charred European continent. The paper defined “famine and pestilence” as new foes to conquer. Four months earlier Assistant Secretary of War John J. McCloy had brought home a similarly dismal image after visiting Europe. Via his boss Henry Stimson, McCloy relayed a disconcerting message to Truman. He predicted “complete economic, social, and political collapse” in Europe “the extent [to which]…is unparalleled in history.” In the absence of a determined U.S.-backed international effort, desolation might make people susceptible to false prophets’ promises of progress in return for ideological commitment. As Stimson personally warned the President, the next winter would cause “pestilence and famine…[potentially] followed by political revolution and Communistic infiltration.”\textsuperscript{24}

The message reflected the concern of the previous decade that an impoverished society would be susceptible to the influence of non-democratic values.

The Truman Administration believed, as had its predecessor, that international cooperation on aid fostered unity between the Allies and the liberated areas and served as a bulwark against communism. In an address to Congress, the President explained that

\textsuperscript{23} \textit{To Enable the United States to Participate in the Work of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration, Hearings on H.J. Res. 192}, House Committee on Foreign Affairs, 78\textsuperscript{th} Congress, (Dec. 1943 and Jan. 1944), p. 120.

\textsuperscript{24} “Another Foe to Conquer,” \textit{The New York Times}, August 19, 1945; “Memorandum for the President by John J. McCloy, April 26, 1945.” HSTL, Harry S. Truman Papers, President’s Secretary’s File, Box 160. “Secretary of War Stimson to President Truman, May 16, 1945,” \textit{Ibid}. 

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“UNRRA is the first of the international organizations to operate in the post-war period…Apart from purely humanitarian considerations, its success will do much to prove the possibility of establishing order and cooperation in a world finally at peace.”

A central component of this American economic mission was the belief that stability and progress provided a remedy for radical ideologies and would forge a clear path to a unified world. In his departing speech as UNRRA head in 1946 Lehman argued that, the “basic problems of understanding between men and between nations exist today as certainly as they existed generations ago…but UNRRA has now given the first simple proof that this understanding can be attained. Now let the leaders of the United Nations profit by that experience, and lead their peoples to a world of peace and security.”

Fiorello H. LaGuardia, the former New York Mayor and Lehman’s successor, similarly defined the organization as a “tremendous influence for good, for right, for justice, for peace, along with world leadership.”

Despite such optimism, UNRRA met domestic opposition from some Republican Congressmen who denounced it as nothing more than a global Works Progress Administration. The majority of opposing voices, however, do not appear to have dismissed aid in principle, but rather worried that Americans were giving handouts without making aid conditional on other nations adopting policies consistent with

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American wishes on trade liberalization and the establishment of democratic values. Others worried that UNRRA’s multinational structure prevented Americans from receiving adequate credit and goodwill for its contributions. Because contributions flowed from several different nations, and because local political leaders most often handled the distribution of aid on the ground, supplier nations were often unknown to the recipients. This raised particular concern among some Congressmen that the Soviets, who were not actively contributing to UNRRA’s operating budget, might use American “supplies sent to areas under its shadow to strengthen the hands of those favoring the spread of communism.” American concerns over misappropriation of funds, however, extended to Great Britain as well, a nation widely believed to use UNRRA funding intended for the homeland to support “proxies in Greece and elsewhere.”

Revisionist historians have often implied that UNRRA, along with the IBRD and the IMF, served primarily as vehicles for American industry. The framework endorsed by such scholars characterizes U.S. postwar foreign economic policy as merely the politicization of a desire to establish a global economic system able to secure “maximum [national] economic growth, efficiently allocate economic resources, and foster economic and political stability.” There is, of course, little doubt that U.S. policymakers thought increased trade would be in the national interest. Historians need to be careful, however,

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not to isolate this pursuit of profit from the larger picture of early American postwar policies. Economic foreign policy was just one complementary piece of a global policy, which established numerous cooperative successes and which ideologically reflected the American sense of mission in the world. Such successes included, in addition to UNRRA, the United Nations Organization for Education, Science and Culture (UNESCO), the eventual creation of the World Health Organization, and the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) which sought to promote “economic and social progress” and to improve standards of living worldwide. It was through ECOSOC, for example, that the Truman Administration in early 1946 pressed for the establishment of the U.N. Human Rights Commission. In these regards, the American postwar effort was inseparable from how Americans historically thought of their mission and its link to global progress. The American National Planning Association fully agreed, claiming that “our technology is now one of the most precious national resources…[it will ensure for us] a position of world leadership [and will aid] the masses of mankind…reaching for higher living standards.” Almost in echo, a singular Saturday Evening Post headline declared simply at the end of 1945 that “World Relief is America’s Job.”

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Americans believed economic collaboration essential to avoiding another depression and to keeping the world united. At the same time, they worried greatly about their newfound

29 Established under Chapter IX of the United Nations Charter, ECOSOC was closely linked to the U.N. principle that economic equality and human rights went hand in hand. For more information, see, Schlesinger, Act of Creation, pp. 240-241, 308-309.

ability to destroy it. As discussions on security and global collaboration in 1945 and 1946 reveal, the American atomic monopoly did not necessarily make diplomacy easier to conduct. The task of navigating American national interest, global visions, and superpower cooperation—all while holstering the atomic bomb—fell to Secretary of State, James Byrnes. As a former Supreme Court justice, Senator, and the man nearly selected ahead of Truman on Roosevelt’s 1944 ticket, Byrnes brought skill and flexibility to foreign policy. At the same time he also proved to be a far more independent Secretary of State than either Stettinius or Hull had been.31

In early September of 1945, Byrnes joined Molotov and the new British Foreign Secretary, Ernest Bevin, for talks in London at the first high-level postwar meetings among the great powers. The three-week conference did not go well.32 The Soviet Union approached the conference as a classic opportunity to carve up the world. Molotov requested trusteeships in the Mediterranean and in North or East Africa as well. Byrnes quickly shut him down.33 In true Rooseveltian fashion, he rejected any attempt by the great powers to exert their will on independent peoples and any horse-trading of colonies. This would not be another Bismarckian Berlin Conference. Prior to his departure for the United Kingdom, Byrnes had implied to John McCloy that he believed he could do much better in the negotiations with Moscow if “he went with it [the atomic bomb] in his hip pocket.”34 The Americans never explicitly used the bomb to apply pressure on the Soviets during the negotiations, but the monopoly likely buoyed Byrnes’s counter

31 Leffler, For the Soul of Mankind, pp. 44-46.
32 For James Byrnes’ evaluation of the conference, see his Speaking Frankly, pp. 91-109.
33 Miscamble, From Roosevelt to Truman, p. 255.
34 Offner, Another Such Victory, p. 102.
demands for elections and civil rights in Romania and Bulgaria. He warned that the U.S. would not recognize any governments unrepresentative of the peoples of these territories. Molotov was unmoved. Soviet records in fact imply that the American atomic monopoly may well have made Moscow more determined not to retreat from its position. The Soviet Foreign Minister dismissed Byrnes’ demand, in effect ignoring the Declaration on Liberated Europe to which Stalin had affixed his signature in February.35

The impasse in U.S.-Soviet relations at the London Conference caused Byrnes to adjust his strategy. Likely based on information he received from Harriman, he appears to have been of the belief, rather naively, that Stalin’s demands for Soviet-controlled governments across Eastern Europe were primarily aimed at addressing Soviet security concerns that had been heightened by Napoleon’s and then Hitler’s use of that region as a corridor to Moscow. If Americans lessened these Soviet security concerns, the Secretary of State reasoned, their need for Communist governments in the region would diminish as well.36 Byrnes understood that Hiroshima and Nagasaki had changed the military and political landscape, escalating Soviet fears. As Craig and Radchenko accurately argue, in this context, tension could only be lowered if the great powers reached an accommodation on research, technology, and possession of the new weapon. From this Byrnes drew the conclusion that the U.S. must surrender its own weapons to international

35 For Moscow’s interpretation of the foreign ministers’ meeting, see V.O. Pechatnov, “The Allies are Pressing on You to Break Your Will...’: Foreign Policy Correspondence between Stalin and Molotov and other Politburo Members, September 1945-December 1946,” Cold War International History Project, Working Papers no. 26 (Woodrow Wilson International Center, 1999), pp. 18-32. Revisionist scholars often placed primary responsibility on Byrnes for the ineffective conference. See, for example, Offner, Another Such Victory, p.p. 102-105; Frank Costigliola, Roosevelt’s Lost Alliances: How Personal Politics Helped Start the Cold War (Princeton University Press, 2011), pp. 378-380.
36 The Ambassador to the Soviet Union (Harriman) to the Secretary of State, November 27, 1945, FRUS 1945, vol. V, pp. 922-924.
monitoring or face the likelihood that “the Soviet Union, and perhaps other nations as well, would refuse to submit themselves to the authority of international government.”37

In November, Byrnes – alongside Bevin, and Canadian Foreign Minister William MacKenzie, – announced a joint initiative to place atomic weapons and research under international control. This Anglo-American-Canadian Agreement proposed the creation of a U.N. Commission to collaborate on “a reciprocal basis with others of the United Nations [on the] detailed information concerning the practical industrial application of atomic energy just as soon as effective enforceable safeguards against its use for destructive purposes can be found.”38 The agreement reflected the signatories’ determination to pursue cooperation among the great powers in general as well as their commitment to further promote the creation of a governing authority to oversee nuclear technology under the auspices of the U.N. It was not an attempt to exclude the Soviet Union from talks over atomic energy. As Henry Wallace wrote in his diary, the meetings with Ottawa and London were simply “preliminary to conferences with the Russians.”39

Domestically, the initiative raised opposition from several Congressmen unwilling to trade away the United States’ military advantage.40 George Kennan shared this concern. Six weeks earlier he had informed Byrnes—in a cable that was pessimistic

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40 For more on Congressional disapproval, see Gaddis, *The United States and the Origins of the Cold War*, pp. 272-275. The Truman Administration’s decision to work with the Soviet Union on atomic energy came at an inopportune time, since the Senate Foreign Relations Committee—responding to requests from Republican and recently resigned Ambassador to China, Patrick J. Hurley—was making inquiries into communist sympathizers in the State Department. For more on this, see Robert L. Messer, *The End of an Alliance: James F. Byrnes, Roosevelt, Truman, and the Origins of the Cold War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), pp. 143-147
even for Kennan—that if the Soviet Union possessed the bomb they would not hesitate to use it against Americans if they deemed it advantageous to “their power position in the world.” The Soviet leaders would not, he warned, be restrained by “scruples of gratitude or humanitarianism” even if the knowledge of atomic energy had been “imparted to them as a gesture of good-will.” The decision to reveal any knowledge to the Soviet Government “without adequate guaranties for the control of its use…would,” he believed, “constitute a frivolous neglect of the vital interests of our people.”

To Kennan, and many others, it seemed particularly dangerous to willingly surrender America’s monopoly at a time when the direction of Soviet postwar foreign policy remained unclear. Of particular concern was the pressure Moscow ever since the war’s final months had been applying on its southwestern neighbor Turkey. Stalin pressed the Ankara government for a renegotiation of the 1936 Montreux Convention which outlined control of the Turkish Straits. Desiring access to the Mediterranean, Moscow demanded joint Soviet-Turkish control of the Bosporus and the Dardanelles, the establishment of permanent Soviet military bases along the straits, and substantial territorial concessions. Unlike the Eastern European states which had either collaborated with Nazi Germany or been liberated by the Soviet Union – forcing Americans to tacitly accept some degree of Soviet influence – Turkey had been neutral during most of the war although like Sweden they had provided Germany and others with resources. At Potsdam Truman and Byrnes backed the Turkish rejection of these demands, insisting that this was

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not a bilateral issue; “the question of the Black Sea Straits concerned the United States and the whole world.” Washington was willing to allow for the internationalization of the straits, but was determined not to grant Moscow exclusive control of them. Throughout the fall of 1945, Moscow stepped up its anti-Ankara propaganda and further increased its pressure on the Turkish government and in the process heightened concerns regarding the wisdom of surrendering the atomic monopoly.42

Regardless of these concerns, the Truman Administration’s plans for increased internationalization of American foreign policy had firm public support. Opinion polls in 1945 and 1946 consistently backed a central role for the United Nations, including influence over member nations’ military capabilities and responsibilities. The internationalization of atomic energy also had the backing of a number of scientists – including Niels Bohr and Albert Einstein as well as Manhattan Project scientists J. Robert Oppenheimer and Edward Teller – former Secretary of War, Henry Stimson, the National League of Women Voters, Walter Lippmann and many others.43 In his influential column “Today and Tomorrow,” Lippmann cautioned the American people, that “awareness that the great power we now possess is newly acquired is the best antidote...against our moral and political immaturity.” The monopoly, he reckoned was temporary. Like the atomic scientists he understood, in strong contrast to men like Forrestal and Vandenberg, that

42 For an internal memorandum outlining Stalin’s, Churchill’s, and Truman’s positions on the Turkish Strait issue, see “Russian-Turkish Frontier,” March 16, 1946. HSTL, Harry S. Truman Papers, President’s Secretary’s Files, Box 112. Also, Herbert Feis, From Trust to Terror: The Onset of the Cold War (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1970), pp. 178-181.
there were only temporary secrets. Dean Acheson agreed telling reporters that collaboration on atomic science would create a “closer understanding” between the Soviet and the Americans.”

Largely ignoring the dissenting voices, Byrnes planned to discuss international control of atomic energy with Stalin during upcoming meetings in Moscow in December in advance of the first United Nations General Assembly meeting scheduled for January in London. The Secretary’s plan, approved by Truman, called not only for U.N. supervision of weapons but also the exchange of and collaboration on, scientific research and development if necessary, before the establishment of safeguards against potential violations on atomic research and production. As he had hoped, Byrnes did receive Stalin’s support for co-sponsorship of a U.N. resolution to establish what would eventually become the United Nations Atomic Energy Commission (UNAEC). The New York Times called the conference “a new start for peace” but as access to Soviet documents now show, Stalin’s support for the internationalization of atomic weapons was deceptive. He had long since made the decision to unilaterally pursue the construction of a Soviet atomic bomb regardless of any collaborative efforts that might be proposed. What likely would have surprised Byrnes even more, considering that the initiative contained an eventual promise to share the knowledge of the bomb, was Moscow’s

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46 Byrnes, Speaking Frankly, pp. 267-268. For Byrnes public report after the visit, see Department of State Bulletin 13, December 30, 1945, pp. 1033-1036.
The unilateral Soviet efforts on atomic development were unbeknownst to Byrnes. He left Moscow in a buoyant mood, convinced that Americans could face “the new year of 1946 with greater hope.” Upon his return to Washington, Byrnes selected Under Secretary of State Dean Acheson to head a group of experts tasked with formulating an American proposal for international collaboration on oversight, inspection, and safeguarding of atomic energy and weapons. To that group, Acheson would add Tennessee Valley Authority Director David Lilienthal, Robert Oppenheimer, former Manhattan Project leader General Leslie Groves, and several others. Thus, American policy in 1946 shifted toward eliminating atomic weapons from national armaments and halting their future development.

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Even as cooperation on atomic energy seemed to be nearing, other events threatened to pull the United States and the Soviet Union apart. During the final months of 1945, perceptive journalists such as the *New York Times*’ James Reston had already begun

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48Byrnes was criticized by some diplomats and political commentators for a policy of appeasement during the Moscow Conference. As he correctly assessed in his memoirs, however, this reflected mostly the opinion of people “so unreasonably anti-Soviet in their views that they would regard any agreement with Russia as appeasement,” Byrnes, *Speaking Frankly*, p. 121. For a more positive contemporary assessment of American atomic policy, see James Reston’s, “The Bomb at London,” *The New York Times*, January 9, 1946.

writing with some clarity about “the Russian problem.” Few, however, at the time thought U.S.-Soviet differences insoluble. For example, it was with confusion, not despair, that the State and Treasury Departments received Stalin’s decision not to ratify Bretton Woods by the end of the 1945 deadline. The war’s damage to agriculture and industry made the Soviet Union a prime candidate for direct IMF support, which by American accounts made participation all the more logical. Refusal to join put any chance of their receiving international aid in jeopardy since UNRRA’s operations were on their last year and since Washington, at this stage, was unlikely to approve bilateral loans to nations outside the new international economic order that after all had been crafted to ensure a collective responsibility and cooperation.

In January 1946, the State Department instructed the U.S. Embassy to provide insight into Moscow’s recalcitrance. Since Harriman departed his post as Ambassador that same month – soon to be filled by Walter Bedell Smith – the task of explaining Soviet behavior fell to the sharp pen of now chargé d’affaires, George Frost Kennan. A veteran Foreign Service officer, Kennan had served five years in Moscow during the thirties under William Bullit, where he witnessed Stalin’s purges firsthand. After spells in Berlin and Prague, he returned to Moscow late in the war as Deputy Chief of Mission

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under Harriman. From there, Kennan delivered one powerful assessment after another of
the Soviet Union and of Stalin. Time and again he cautioned against the kind of seamless
one-world cooperation that FDR envisioned and Truman hoped for. Such policies, he
believed, were unlikely to yield success given the incessant imperial and ideological
ambitions on display in Moscow. For Kennan, Communism represented “an enemy…He
was a grave observer of spiritual phenomena, some white, some black. Nothing much in
between. One was either with us or against us,” recalled John and Patricia Davies who
knew him in Moscow.53

Attempting to clarify Moscow’s economic policies, Kennan in early 1946
explained that Stalin’s lack of cooperation rested on “complete Soviet confidence” that
the U.S. faced economic problems at home including internal labor unrest of such a
magnitude that Washington would be forced to export “on credit…on a large scale” to the
Soviet Union. Communist ideology manifested a “conviction that economic struggle
between the U.S and Great Britain [was] bound to lead to actual tension between those
two countries.” In short, Stalin’s hesitation over Bretton Woods stemmed from his belief
that inherent conditions in the capitalist system would, in time, force the U.S. to issue
bilateral loans to the Soviets that would come with far fewer strings than membership in
an international organization.54

Kennan’s interpretation was soon provided extra impetus by a number of election
speeches given by Stalin and his Politburo in early February. Stalin, Georgy Malenkov,

53 Interview with John and Patricia Davies, cited in Gaddis, George F. Kennan: An American Life (Penguin
54 Kennan to Secretary of State, January 29, 1946. HSTL, George M. Elsey Papers, Box 63. Kennan to
Secretary of State, February 5, 1946. HSTL, George M. Elsey Papers, Box 63.
and Lazar Kaganovich hailed the Communist system’s “superior democracy” and called for the Soviet Union to consolidate victory “and increase [the] economic might of USSR.” Stalin in particular brought back the ideological Leninist language of the inevitability of conflict between communists and capitalists, implying that he did not share the American vision of a world united under the U.N. He derided the idea that capitalist powers were capable of fairly and honorably distributing resources and raw materials, and he predicted future conflict. The Second World War, Stalin argued, proved the supremacy of communism and the superiority of collectivization. Though Stalin’s speech was intended to explain and prepare his own people for the domestic sacrifice to come, it was read by many overseas as a repudiation of the American world order.56

On February 22, Kennan sent a five and a half thousand word telegram to Washington attempting to explain these events within a larger Russian and Communist context. Dubbed the Long Telegram, Kennan’s cable reinforced an argument that he had been trying to make for years to Averell Harriman, Harry Hopkins, and anybody else willing to listen. Tracing the roots of Russian nationalism and imperialism on one hand, and Communist ideology on the other, he explained that Marxism-Leninism served as a fig leaf of “moral and intellectual respectability.” Because Moscow by definition sought to expand, American collaboration with the Soviet Union was not a sustainable policy. While “impervious to the logic of reason,” he concluded, Moscow was still “highly

55 For the U.S. Embassy’s evaluation of the early pre-election speeches, see, Kennan to the Secretary of State, February 2, 1946; February 5, 1946; February 7, 1946; February 12, 1946, FRUS, 1946, vol. VI, pp. 688-696.
56 For Stalin’s speech see, J. Stalin, Speech Delivered at Meetings of Voters of the Stalin Electoral District, Moscow, (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1950).
sensitive to the logic of force.” It was clear, he insisted, that with a regime this aggressive by nature, “no permanent modus vivendi” would be possible.57

Stalin’s speech and Kennan’s Long Telegram have become Cold War icons. But in retrospect it is easy to exaggerate their influence on U.S. policy. Yes, Secretary of the Navy James Forrestal, along with Walter Lippmann, Republicans John Foster Dulles and Arthur Vandenberg, and Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas – the latter hyperbolically calling Stalin’s speech, “the declaration of World War III” – deemed Moscow’s narrative of global affairs deeply troubling. But most responses were in fact fairly calm. The two-week lag between Stalin’s speech and the Long Telegram reflected that Kennan too found the speech so pedestrian and so adherent to traditional Muscovite rhetoric that there was no reason to provide more than a summary of its contents.58 When questioned by reporters Truman quipped that “we always have to demagogue a little before elections” and Dean Acheson informed one alarmed State Department official that he was “just seeing hobgoblins under the bed.”59 The Washington Post and Time magazine, as well as several other news outlets, found the speech intriguing but unthreatening. The Saturday Evening Post concluded that the speech should not stop American efforts to create their “one world.”60

57 Kennan to the Secretary of State, February 22, 1946, FRUS, 1946 vol. VI, pp. 696-709. For Kennan’s later recollections of the composition of the telegram see his Memoirs, pp. 271-297. For the most recent analysis see Gaddis, George F. Kennan, pp. 201-203.
58 Gaddis, George F. Kennan, p. 216.
59 Ironically, Acheson would later refer to this as the moment the Cold war began, but his papers show little sign of such a perspective. See, Beisner, Dean Acheson: A Life in the Cold War (Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 36-37.
Similarly Kennan’s classified cable has, in hindsight, been assigned more influence than it likely had at the time. As Cold War scholars have frequently argued, it was widely circulated, primarily by Forrestal, and it reached Truman’s inner circle as well. Yet, there is no indication that it set in motion any earth-shattering Cold War thoughts or policies. When asked about the Long Telegram later, Clark Clifford, Truman’s primary advisor, was unable to recall that “any particular significance was attached to it” at the time. It was, as he recalls it, simply “one of a number of inputs.” The cabinet had “memos from the Secretary of State, War, Navy, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and Admiral Leahy; these were all top people [and] Kennan had not achieved the reputation then that he later was to achieve.”

American policy did not jerk into crisis mode either when that same month the reporter Drew Pearson broke a story about Soviet espionage in Canada. Based on classified information from Igor Gouzenko, a defected former cipher clerk at the Soviet Embassy in Ottawa, the story implied similar atomic espionage against the United States. The Truman Administration had in fact known of the Gouzenko affair since the previous September but had chosen not to reveal the story out of fear that it might jeopardize international collaboration. Internally, Byrnes and Acheson quietly took steps

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61 For some of these exaggerations, see Leffler, *A Preponderance of Power*, pp. 108-109; Pollard, p. 55; David A. Mayers, *George Kennan and the Dilemmas of U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 100-101. Offner sees the Long Telegram as emblematic of what he calls Truman’s “get tough” policy. Certainly Washington’s tone was changing, but February 1946 is far too early to place the beginnings of this policy. Offner, it would seem, is a victim of having read history backwards and of being too conscious of the Cold War’s coming. See his *Another Such Victory*, pp. 132-134.
62 Oral interview with Clark M. Clifford. HSTL, Oral History Collection. See also Miscamble, pp. 279-280.
63 Amy Knight, *How the Cold War Began: The Gouzenko Affair and the Hunt for Communist Spies* (New York: Carroll and Graf, 2005), pp. 104-111. Knight argues that Pearson likely received the classified information from FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover who hoped to force the Truman Administration to shelve its plans of international atomic control.
to weed out employees with “suspected histories,” but beyond that the story had garnered remarkably little concern. Even in the face of espionage Truman was not ready to give up on a united world order or to accept the inevitability of conflict with Moscow.

The depth of this global commitment was about to be brought to the test. In early March the former British Prime Minister Winston Churchill visited the United States. From Washington he and Truman journeyed to Fulton, Missouri where Churchill had been invited to deliver a speech at Westminster College. “The Sinews of Peace,” as he dubbed his speech, warned the western powers not to repeat the indecision they had shown in the thirties. An “iron curtain,” Churchill declared in a somber voice, had “descended on the continent” of Europe, separating it into a Soviet and a democratic sphere. He called for the “fraternal association of the English-speaking peoples” including military collaboration and warned against “Communist and neo-Fascist” forces. Although Churchill also suggested greater military collaboration within the U.N., it is tempting, in the context of what followed in the world, to view his address as an omen, if not a declaration, of the Cold War. Since Truman shared the stage with Churchill it is equally tempting to imagine that the former Prime Minister and the President must have intensely debated the state of global affairs on the long train ride to the Midwest and that Truman thoroughly approved of the speech’s message. The indication is, however, that whiskey and poker “took priority over international affairs” throughout Churchill and

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Truman’s journey and Truman had not read the advance copy of the speech as carefully as he perhaps should have.65

Although the President had glanced at Churchill’s speech in advance, its presumptive message of a divided world ventured much further than Washington was willing to go. An editorial in *Collier’s* magazine from later that month emphasized that the U.S. needed to be “world umpire and world leader.” A supplementary sketch in the same issue showed Uncle Sam holding the reins of the world, one labeled “leadership,” the other “conciliation.”66 *Collier’s* message reflected how Americans thought of their role in the world in March 1946. It remained a one-world role under American guidance not in alliance with Great Britain. Churchill’s language was seen as too divisive, his tone too provocative, and his message too affirming of an old world balance of power system. Several U.S. Congressmen condemned “Sinews of Peace” as hyperbole and warmongering. Liberal Senators like Glen Taylor (D-ID) and Claude Pepper (D-FL) were among the most critical. Taylor insisted that the former Prime Minister simply wanted to “cut the throat of the UNO and destroy the unity of the Big Three.” Andrew May (D-KY) insisted that “he thought the U.S. should take no position on any military alliance [as suggested by Churchill] until a chance had been Russia to state her aims through the United Nations.” Conservative reporters like Henry Chamberlain supported Churchill but

65 For Churchill’s address see [http://www.nationalchurchillmuseum.org/sinews-of-peace-iron-curtain-speech.html](http://www.nationalchurchillmuseum.org/sinews-of-peace-iron-curtain-speech.html). (Accessed 12.07.2012); Miscamble, *From Roosevelt to Truman*, p. 282. While Churchill unquestionably sought Truman’s support in Europe, even he still maintained a strong belief in the United Nations. In a now long-forgotten passage of the speech he called for the creation of an effective U.N. military force. While details remained to be worked out, the establishment of such a force had been part of the United Nations’ plans from the beginning under the Military Staff Council created as part of the Charter.

they were in the minority. *The New York Herald Tribune* found the speech “off target” and Walter Lippmann considered it an “almost catastrophic blunder.” As he pointed out, the “line of British imperial interest and the line of American vital interest are not to be regarded as identical.” In his view, as long as the United States was trying to make peace through the United Nations it would “unattractive” and “unwise” to unite with Britain given the number of peoples who “under British rule or within the sphere of influence [of Britain] are not English speaking and do not have a joint inheritance of freedom.”67

When queried about the speech by journalists, even Truman got defensive. He denied having seen an advance copy and insisted that “this is a country of free speech. Mr. Churchill had a perfect right to say what he pleased. I was there as his host in Missouri, because I had told him if he would come over here and give a lecture at that little college, that I would be glad to introduce him.” Probably to ensure that he did not appear to have endorsed the speech, Truman also instructed Acheson not to attend a function in honor of Churchill in New York.68

Churchill’s “iron curtain” address is most often thought of in a European context but British concerns extended to the Middle East, the Mediterranean, and the Suez Canal as well. Initial Soviet attempts at gaining influence in Turkey had been blocked, but by

December 1945 a far more complex crisis arose in neighboring Iran. During the war, London and Moscow had jointly occupied Iran to prevent Nazi Germany from gaining access to Iranian oil. The Anglo-Soviet agreement gave the Red Army control of the northern half of Iran and the British control of the southern half. Both occupying armies pledged to withdraw no more than six months after the war’s end. By late 1945, however, the Soviets reneged on this commitment. Instead Stalin threw his support behind the left-leaning Tudeh Party inside Iran while simultaneously backing a separatist movement in the Iranian province of Azerbaijan close to the Soviet border. These actions caused concern in Washington. On one hand, the U.N. had been created to protect smaller nations in crises like this. On the other, as Loy Henderson, the State Department’s Director of Near Eastern and African Affairs, told Byrnes in consideration of both the Turkish and Iranian affairs, it might be vital “to spare the UNO this supreme test at the very outset of its existence, for it might not survive such a test.” Despite these concerns, Washington encouraged the Iranian government to launch a formal complaint with the Security Council, which it did in January. As Byrnes explained to his staff, he had told the Iranian Ambassador that “we would support him” and that he did “not intend to violate that assurance.” From Moscow, Kennan wrote the former General and now

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69 Records from Soviet archives appear to confirm that the Soviet Union was not planning to annex Iran, at least not at this time. However, given the Soviet annexation of the Baltics, it was understandable that this concerned the Western powers. For a good analysis based on Soviet documents, see Natalia I. Yegarova, *The “Iranian Crisis” of 1945-1946: A View from the Russian Archive*, (Cold War International History Project, Washington, D.C., 1996).


71 For an interesting firsthand account by the American Ambassador George V. Allen, see his unpublished manuscript on his time in Iran. HSTL, George V. Allen Papers, Box 1.
special envoy for Truman, George C. Marshall, that even if the Soviets might for now “take possibilities for direct and immediate UNO sanctions...[lightly], they must know that the policies they are following...if further pursued, have deep and unfortunate repercussions on great power relations and collaboration.”

Intense Security Council debates followed in March, as the agreed upon Soviet withdrawal deadline formally expired. Furious at having to defend Stalin’s actions in front of the international community, the Soviet Ambassador Andrei Gromyko attempted a dramatic seventeen-day boycott of the Council in hope of forcing a solution. He misunderstood, however, that to the Americans the principles of the organization, at this stage at least, outweighed their determination for superpower harmony. In April, Moscow and Tehran reached an agreement that led to the removal of Soviet troops from the territory. Washington hailed the outcome as a victory for the United Nations and an assurance that the organization, as intended, was capable of protecting the weaker states from the more powerful ones.

In the aftermath, Ambassador Smith met with Stalin and Molotov for two hours in Moscow. Although at times the encounter grew heated, Smith assured Stalin that the

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72 Kennan to the Secretary of State, March 14, 1946. HSTL George M. Elsey Papers, Box 60.
74 There is little evidence of the revisionist claim that the Iranian crisis was about Western economic determination to protect oil concessions or that the Iranian government was little more than a pawn to U.S. policy. This is LaFeber’s position, as detailed in his America, Russia, and the Cold War, pp. 40-41. Arnold Offner incorrectly claims that the U.S. did not support the Iranian case being brought before the Security Council and that Americans only chose to support this when it became clear in April that they could score a political victory over Moscow. For more, see his, Another Such Victory, pp. 135-142. Offner apparently did not consult Ambassador Allen’s Papers at the Truman Presidential Library. Documentary evidence here provides evidence that Byrnes, Allen, and Henderson strongly backed the Iranian cause from the beginning. HSTL, George V. Allen Papers, Manuscript File, Box 1.
75 Bohlen, The Transformation of American Foreign Policy, pp. 78-80.
United States supported collaboration with the Soviet Union for the purposes of maintaining peace. He emphasized that American policy remained committed to the solving of international problems through the United Nations. The Ambassador even extended an invitation from President Truman for the Soviet leader to visit the United States. Stalin declined, responding that although he would like to, “age has taken its toll. My doctors tell me that I must not travel and I am kept on a strict diet.”

Truman’s offer of improved relations was not disingenuous. The President was deeply disturbed by Churchill’s speech. He had publicly remained neutral after Churchill’s performance, but a private memorandum in his personal papers, jotted down two weeks later, makes it emphatically clear that he was not. Here he criticized both the speech’s contents and its implications. As an alternative to Churchill’s divisive rhetoric, Truman instead suggested “that the U.S. should lead in the UNO by offering” what he called, “a positive program for international cooperation.” He wanted a collaborative U.S.-Soviet solution on Iran and Turkey, what he referred to as a “Potsdam Agreement for the Middle East.” He worried that in the absence of American leadership, conflict between London and Moscow might lead to “the breaking up of the world into hostile and competing blocs of nations.” He pondered that perhaps more frequent Soviet-Anglo-American Foreign Minister Conferences would “guarantee that all major future problems, for the next few years at least, would be settled within the UNO framework.” The future of atomic energy being such a problem, Truman was determined that Americans should make “every possible effort” to press forward with the “work of the United Nations

76 Ambassador Smith to President Truman, April 5, 1946. HSTL, Harry S. Truman Papers, President’s Secretary’s Files, Box 164.
Atomic Energy Commission” to guarantee “international control of this new force.” As Truman saw it, the U.S. appeared “the only nation capable of pressing a view at this time, neither ambitious nor fearful, [and] capable of making the spirit of the UNO come alive.” The president was convinced that the “American people in their hearts are looking to their leaders for this kind of constructive leadership. This administration cannot fail them and mankind.” Faith in the U.N. was alive and well in the White House. So was faith in American exceptionalist ideology.

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At the height of the Iranian crisis, and in the middle of the fallout from Churchill’s speech, the Acheson group completed its report on international atomic cooperation. The Gouzenko espionage case had had no impact on either the work or the conclusions. As highlighted above, Truman and Byrnes viewed a solution on atomic weapon as central to global peace and order and both men welcomed the Acheson group’s conclusions. The reaction from the American press was favorable too, calling the Acheson-Lilienthal

78 For Byrnes positive view of the Acheson-Lilienthal Report, see, “James Byrnes to Bernard Baruch, April 19, 1946,” HSTL, Harry S. Truman Papers, President’s Secretary’s Files, Box 97. Craig and Radchenko speculate that Truman was never serious about international control of atomic energy. After Truman first learned of Soviet espionage in September 1945, they argue, every American initiative was a mere ploy to place blame on the Soviet Union when it failed. See, Craig and Radchenko, The Atomic Bomb and the Origins of the Cold War, pp. 123-131. David Tal makes a similar, but even less convincing, argument in The American Nuclear Disarmament Dilemma, 1945-1963 (Syracuse University Press, 2008), p. 16. Recently, Frank Costigliola similarly argued that the U.S. had no intention of supporting international atomic energy because Washington did not believe that the “oriental” Russians had the capability to develop atomic weapons without American assistance. He made this argument at a Roundtable on, “Emotions, Culture, and the Writings of American Foreign Relations,” at the 127th Annual Meeting of the American Historical Association, New Orleans, LA, January 4, 2013. There is no documentary evidence to sustain this general argument that American plans for international cooperation on atomic energy was a conspiracy, nor do any of these scholars provide any evidence for who might have been involved or how they managed to dupe the international community and the American people into believing that the U.S. favored collaboration on this issue.
report, as the group’s final document became known, “brilliant” and “a balanced approach” to the complex issue of international oversight.\textsuperscript{79} The reported reflected the philosophy, of which J. Robert Oppenheimer was the primary spokesman, that “an international arrangement on atomic energy could be the foundation stone of a wider agreement leading to enduring peace.”\textsuperscript{80}

At the end of April, Dean Acheson appeared alongside former Manhattan Project administrator and founder of Raytheon, Vannevar Bush, on CBS for a lengthy discussion of the report’s conclusions. The core of the matter, as the Under Secretary of State explained it to the American public, was the need for international regulation of atomic research and technology, along with international control of natural elements like uranium and thorium, essential to the creation of atomic energy. Conscious of Soviet sensitivity to international onsite inspections, the report instead recommended placing the “mining and possession of uranium and thorium under the control of an international body” as a similarly effective method of ensuring compliance. Seeking a collaborative effort the authors also, as Acheson relayed it in his memoirs, carefully avoided “dangerous words,” that might “wreck any possibility” of Soviet acceptance.\textsuperscript{81}

The report was intended as a roadmap for American policy at the upcoming UNAEC meeting in June. Regardless of its popular reception, however, Bernard Baruch,

\textsuperscript{81} “Discussion by Under Secretary of State Dean Acheson and Dr. Vannevar Bush, with Mr. Larry Lesuer, over the Network of the Columbia Broadcasting System,” April 23, 1946. HSTL, Dean Acheson Papers, Box 134. Dean Acheson, \textit{Present at the Creation}, p. 154-155.
the man Truman appointed to present America’s case to the international community, “hit
the ceiling when he saw the report.” Unimpressed with Acheson’s recommendations,
Baruch threatened to resign immediately if the State Department insisted on using it as a
“working paper” for U.S. policy. Byrnes had recommended Baruch to Truman because of
the wealthy financier’s previous experience in supporting presidents and the two men’s
cooperation during Byrnes tenure as Director of the War Mobilization Board. More
importantly Baruch had extensive connections on Capitol Hill, including close
relationships with several high-ranking Republicans. The appointment backfired. The
Secretary underestimated the extent to which Baruch, now in his mid-seventies, loathed
being the Administration’s errand boy. Baruch wanted to leave an indelible thumbprint
on policy. His actions and attitude left Acheson and Lilienthal unimpressed. In his diary
the latter dismissed Baruch and his personal team of advisors as “silly men” and their
views as “childish.” Acheson too was unmoved by their views and by Baruch’s intellect,
but his and Lilienthal’s opposition carried little weight. Reflecting on his own

82 Margaret Coit, Mr. Baruch (Boston, 1957), pp. 565-585. “Personalities vs. the Atom,” The Washington
Post, May 28, 1946. Senator Robert Taft agreed with Baruch’s assessment of the report. A year later, when
David Lilienthal was being considered as Chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission, Taft vociferously
opposed his nomination, charging that the Acheson-Lilienthal Report “proposed to turn over the atom
bomb to the United Nations without any of the safeguards later insisted upon by Mr. Baruch.” Taft also
wrongly denounced Lilienthal as “an extreme left-winger with…a soft spot toward Communism.” For
more, see his “Statement on the Confirmation of David Lilienthal, 22 February, 1947,” in The Papers of
Leslie Groves who had been among the early members of the Acheson-Lilienthal group broke with the
report’s conclusions and aligned himself with Baruch’s view. Ignoring the advice of scientists, Groves
believed that the American technological superiority provided them an unassailable lead in atomic
weaponry and research. While he concurred with Acheson and Lilienthal that the primary way to prevent
an atomic arms race was by securing control of radioactive ores, Groves wanted American not international
control. He envisioned a pax atomica, enforced by the United States. On Groves views and role see, Gregg
recreation years later, Byrnes considered it the “the greatest mistake” he ever made but the heavy pressure on the Democratic Party ahead of the November midterm elections made the political consequences of dismissing Baruch too great to bear.\(^84\)

On June 15, Baruch presented his revised version of the American proposal to the UNAEC. It called for the creation of an international Atomic Development Authority (ADA) which would have sole control of all phases of research, manufacturing, and production of atomic energy. The ADA would execute inspections throughout member nations to guarantee against unilateral weaponization. Baruch also insisted that the exceptional nature of the atomic issue demanded that the permanent members of the Security Council relinquish their veto prerogative on this particular issue and that the United Nations, acting on recommendations from the ADA, should be granted the authority to punish any nation violating the agreement. Only once effective controls were in place would the U.S. yield its atomic monopoly.\(^85\)

Bernard Brodie, one of the postwar era’s most insightful commentators on modern warfare, questioned Baruch’s view of the veto since, as he put it, “no one clearly knows to what kinds of decisions in the program the veto will have relevance.” Oppenheimer too was unimpressed and deemed it unlikely that the Soviets would accept it.\(^86\) After some reflection, Truman aligned himself with Baruch’s conclusions. As he

\(^{84}\) Lilienthal poured out his frustration in his diaries. See in particular his entries between May 11 and June 15, 1946 in David A Lilienthal, *Journals*, vol. II, pp. 44-62. For Acheson’s view of Baruch, see his *Present at the Creation*, pp. 155-156. For Byrnes later view of Baruch, see Offner, *Another Such Victory*, p. 147; Miscamble, *From Roosevelt to Truman*, p. 288. For an interesting view of the Administration’s frustration with Baruch see, Oral Interview with R. Gordon Arneson, HSTL, Oral History Collection.


explained to Baruch in a letter, “we should not under any circumstances throw away our gun until [we are] sure the rest of the world can’t arm against us.” The President, in other words, was unwilling to rely on the good faith of others. While hardly unreasonable, the Soviets viewed the abrogation of the veto on atomic matters as a sly attempt to undermine their influence in the Security Council and as a violation of sovereignty. Combined with the virtual American dominance of the United Nations that characterized the organization until the non-aligned nations and former colonized nations entered the U.N. in the nineteen-fifties and sixties, Baruch’s Plan can only have appeared as further strengthening America’s political and military hand. In June and July, Gromyko presented a counteroffer demanding the abolition of all atomic weapons prior to the approval of any rules on inspections or oversight. Given Moscow’s own on-going atomic research this was a cunning but fruitless proposal.

In a period of international calm, the Truman Administration would perhaps have entertained Gromyko’s proposal. Given the growing concern that Moscow was willing to use its veto far more liberally than the United Nations’ founders had intended, the Soviet counter proposal was stillborn. Americans were willing to surrender their atomic advantage to the authority of the United Nations, but not if Moscow had the power to

87 “Bernard Baruch to President Truman, July 2, 1946”; “President Truman to Bernard Baruch, July 10, 1946.” HSTL, Harry S. Truman Papers, President’s Secretary’s Files, Box 97. See also Acheson to Baruch, June 25, 1946, FRUS 1946, vol. 1, pp. 858-859.
hold the organization hostage. Kennan understood as much. As he explained to Dean Acheson, Gromyko's proposal counted on “the American conscience and the merciless spot-light of free information and publicity in the United States...to guarantee the faithful fulfillment of such obligations on our part.” At the same time, he explained, “they are counting no less confidently on their own security controls to enable them to proceed undisturbed with the development of atomic weapons in secrecy within the Soviet Union.”

Kennan did not know about the Soviet nuclear program underway but he knew the Soviet political leadership. Partly in response to this stalemate, Truman signed into law a much debated bill on atomic energy in early August. Commonly referred to as the McMahon Act, it removed permanently from the possession of the military all control of atomic weapons. In the realm of American foreign policy, the law introduced the so-called “classified at birth” clause that prevented Americans from sharing any atomic information with any foreign power or individual. If the Americans could not have an international agreement they approved, it was looking increasingly less likely that they would share anything at all.

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The wavering between the Acheson-Lilienthal report, the Baruch Plan, and the passage of the McMahon Act reflected the deepening tensions among Americans over the nation’s foreign policy course. The outlines of the Cold War were appearing even though their consequences were by no means yet clear. Truman wanted international collaboration,

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but on American terms. This had always been Washington’s expectation for the postwar order. Americans were not yet, in the summer of 1946, thinking of the world as a zero-sum game between the free world and the Communist world. Still, the nation’s acceptance that its responsibilities were now global caused Americans to suspect Stalin’s moves in every corner of the globe. Foreign policy was no longer executed in a vacuum. No matter how tangential, incidents were quick to be linked in this era of growing uncertainty and mistrust.

One example of this was the resurrection of the Turkish crisis just as debates on the international control of atomic energy intensified in the UNAEC. In the late summer of 1946, Stalin again stepped up the pressure on Ankara on the Straits issue. For over a year Moscow’s demands had caused a higher than normal level of mobilization in Turkey draining that nation’s already depleted coffers. In August an increase in Soviet troop numbers in neighboring Bulgaria and Romania raised fears in Washington that Moscow might either invade or be seeking to turn Turkey into a satellite state.\(^9\) Although Truman’s advisors did not specifically cite Kennan’s Long Telegram, it was his conclusions regarding Soviet aggression against neighboring states that they began to fear were coming true. When briefed on the situation by Acheson and several other high level advisors, Truman concluded that it was time to send Moscow a message. Americans, he

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92 Eduard Mark, “The War Scare of 1946,” *Diplomatic History*, vol. 21, no. 3 (Summer, 1997), pp. 383-415. Arnold Offner, in stark contrast to Mark, concludes rather unconvincingly that the event was in effect made up in Washington and that the issue was “not a Soviet military threat to Turkey but broad U.S. political-strategic concerns.” See Offner, *Another Such Victory*, pp. 167-173. Offner’s interpretation strongly underestimates the concern in Washington that if great powers were allowed to bully smaller ones it would lead to the emasculation of the United Nations and the return of an international order dominated by spheres of influence.
insisted “might as well find out now rather than five or ten years later whether the Soviets were bent on world domination.” He authorized Acheson to deliver a stern note to Moscow, immediately released to the public as well, in which the U.S. chastised the Soviet Union for attempting to solve the issue bilaterally rather than through the United Nations. To show his determination, Truman also ordered the aircraft carrier USS *Franklin D. Roosevelt* into the Mediterranean, which led to Soviet accusations of American “gangster diplomacy.” As the situation intensified some members of the American press feared these developments would lead to war. Soviet sources now appear to confirm that it was only when Donald MacLean – one of a group of Soviet spies in MI5, often referred to as the Cambridge 5 – informed Stalin of the seriousness of the American response that Moscow stood down in early September.

Events unfolding simultaneously in Germany had no direct link to either the Turkish situation or to the on-going debates on atomic weapons, but their proximity in time nevertheless raised international tensions even further. At the Potsdam Conference, the victorious powers had divided Germany into four zones, each controlled by one occupying power. This zonal division arose strictly from practical administrative considerations, not from political or ideological ones. As was the case in Korea (see chapter six), this decentralization was expected to be temporary, and great power

93 Miscamble, *From Roosevelt to Truman*, p. 295. See also the Secretary of the Navy’s recollection of the meeting in *The Forrestal Diaries* ed. Walter Millis (New York; Viking Press, 1951), p. 192.
collaboration was expected to endure. The decision to place the Allied Control Council headquarters in Berlin, deep inside the Soviet zone, was one sign of this united effort, as was the decision to jointly try high-ranking members of the Nazi political and military machinery at Nuremberg.

Nevertheless, the first year of occupation had not gone well. The Americans agreed with Moscow on little. Meanwhile the German people starved. By early 1946, the Military Governor of the American zone, U.S. Army General Lucius Clay, began lobbying for increased integration among the four zones to ensure economic and social stabilization. The initiative reflected a genuine American concern over conditions within Germany as well as an American desire that the occupying powers move forward on the original plan to treat Germany as a single unit rather than four separate occupation zones. 96 Clay was also suspicious, however, of the Soviet Union’s expropriation of industry from within its zone. Although Byrnes had agreed to zonal reparations, the extent at which Moscow executed this policy was deemed detrimental to both Germany’s and Europe’s recovery as a whole. Equally disturbing was the Soviets’ blatant efforts, underway since the start of the year, to spread Communist influence across all four zones. In the Soviet zone, Stalin had directed the Kommunistische Partei (KPD) and the Sozialdemokratische Partei (SPD) to unite as the Sozialistische Einheitspartei (SED) in early 1946. In contrast to initiatives in the American zone, the Soviets showed no sign of

96 George Kennan was opposed to Clay’s plan because it once again implied that cooperation with the Soviet Union was possible. He favored German partition as a more logical path and a more effective containment strategy. See, Kennan to Secretary of State, March 6, 1946, FRUS, 1946 vol. 5, pp. 516-520.
allowing the Germans the opportunity to pursue their own political choices. 97 Rather, they were looking to strengthen SED influence, and by extension Communist influence, across Germany. Clay believed that uniting the occupied zones would create a greater economic potential, thereby curbing the SED’s political reach. 98 Molotov dismissed Clay’s suggestion and condemned the Americans for going back on the zonal-reparations initiative. He implied that Americans in fact plotted a return to the Morgenthau Plan leading to the annihilation of Germany as a state and insisted that the Soviet Union’s treatment of its zone had been honorable and fair. 99

In this tense atmosphere James Byrnes traveled to Germany to deliver perhaps the most significant speech by a U.S. official on European soil. At the Stuttgart Opera House in early September, the Secretary of State outlined directly to the German people the core of American policies. Ideologically, the speech reflected American policy since the war’s end: stabilization, democratization, de-militarization, and de-Nazification. But Byrnes went further. In a dramatic gesture, he made unification of the occupation zones American policy as well, and, in a thinly veiled critique of Soviet and French zonal ambitions, he promised the German people sovereignty and eventual independence under international supervision. He guaranteed that despite the war and the occupation, “we do

98 For an excellent contemporary analysis of American policy toward Germany, see Joseph Alsop’s, “Control of Germany,” The Washington Post, August 28, 1946.
not want Germany to become the satellite of any power.”¹⁰⁰ As the crowd rose to its feet in applause and the band played the Star Spangled Banner, Senator Vandenberg, on stage with Byrnes, turned to the Secretary and insisted that the tune had “never before given me such a chill.” It was not surprising. Even for the former isolationist Senator, Byrnes’ declaration of American commitment to those threatened by totalitarianism struck a powerful chord. It also sent a strong message to Moscow, London, and Paris, that the U.S. promise to the international order remained firm. The American press hailed the speech as a profound declaration of American international commitment and interpreted it as an offer to the other great powers of either “rivalry or cooperation.” Interestingly, and significantly, reporters interpreted the speech as an offer rather than a dare.¹⁰¹

The performance was perhaps Byrnes’ finest as Secretary of State. But within days, events back home threatened to undermine him. In July, Truman had asked a number of cabinet members and close advisors to present to him their views on the future direction of American foreign policy. Among the respondents was his Secretary of Commerce, FDR’s former Vice President, Henry Wallace. Wallace was viewed by many as somewhat radical. For years, he had worked tirelessly for the promotion of social justice on a global scale. In 1942, he had powerfully proclaimed that with victory in the war would come “the century of the common man” and called on the U.S. to lead in the creation of such a new order. He was no less a believer in American Exceptionalism than

Truman and he also shared many of Henry Luce’s view of the role Americans could and should take to ensure that the needs of people were met regardless of nationality or race. Wallace’s at times supranational views which placed the plight of all peoples above national interest, however, also caused him to take a more generous view of the Soviet Union than most other officials in Washington. He was not a Communist, but he sympathized with the principles of social equality that Marx’s doctrines endorsed. He saw great power collaboration as the only responsible path to peace, equality, and the abolition of empires.102

Five days after Byrnes’ Stuttgart performance, Wallace shared with Truman a speech he was himself preparing to deliver in New York City. Repeating the pattern from Churchill’s iron curtain speech six months earlier, Truman would later claim that he had given the speech only a hasty glance, but since it predictably mirrored the views Wallace had presented to Truman in his reply to the President’s July request, the contents should not have been unfamiliar to him. Wallace’s speech denounced the British Empire and warned that London’s policies would drag the United States into war. Atomic weapons, he insisted should be under the control of the United Nations if peace was to be guaranteed. Americans, Wallace insisted, needed to compromise with the Soviet Union over atomic weapons. He chastised those who took an aggressive stance against the Soviet Union as warmongers, calling instead for what later would be called “peaceful co-existence” between the two powers. The speech was not an attack on Truman’s foreign

102 A good understanding of Wallace’s views can be found in the pamphlets he published. See his, The Price of Free World Victory; The Century of the Common Man (New York: Reynal & Hitchcock, 1943); Christian Bases of World Order (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1943).
policy; it merely reflected the peculiar pacific nature of Wallace’s social and political
thought that had been evident throughout the entirety of his long public service.\textsuperscript{103}

The speech did, however, reflect a milder position than the one Truman had taken
on Turkey. It was also much softer than the one Secretary of State Byrnes had presented
in Stuttgart, leaving Byrnes deeply disappointed. He cabled Truman from Europe
explaining that “the world is today in doubt not only as to American foreign policy, but
as to your policy.” Essentially, he was telling the President that across the Atlantic people
now questioned Washington’s commitment to a democratic Europe. Already planning to
resign at the end of the year due to ill health, Byrnes now informed Truman that he could
not continue one more day if “the administration is itself divided.” Baruch publicly
followed suit, threatening to walk away from his U.N. position if Truman took no action
against Wallace.\textsuperscript{104}

We know little of Truman’s initial personal reaction to the chaos, although he
publicly expressed disbelief. On the day of the speech Truman had in fact told reporters
that he had read and approved Wallace’s address, a point Wallace went on to make in the
speech as well. Even so, the fallout appears to have stunned the President. Two days later
he tried to cover himself by issuing a statement that he had misspoken when he told
reporters of his approval.\textsuperscript{105} Regardless, the incident made the direction of U.S. global

\textsuperscript{103} For the full text of Wallace’s speech, see Wallace, \textit{The Price of Vision: The Diary of Henry A. Wallace},
pp. 661-669.
\textsuperscript{104} Byrnes, \textit{Speaking Frankly}, pp. 239-243.
\textsuperscript{105} Very unconvincingly, Truman told reporters on September 14th that there had been a misunderstanding
regarding the answer he had previously made. He said, “The question was answered extemporaneously and
my answer did not convey the thought that I intended it to convey. It was my intention to express the
thought that I approved the right of the Secretary of Commerce to deliver the speech. I did not intend to
indicate that I approved the speech as constituting a statement of the foreign policy of this country. There
policy unclear, a public consequence that Truman was left to sort out. He could have dismissed Wallace on the spot, thereby sending a clear message that he supported the policies presented by Byrnes and Baruch, but he did not. This decision raises major questions about the frequently proposed view that Truman pursued a solid “get tough” policy with the Soviet Union throughout 1946.

On September 18, six days after Wallace’s speech, things took a turn for the worse for the President. The American media published in full the long confidential letter with policy recommendations that Wallace had presented to the President in July. Released without Truman’s approval, the letter tore into the Baruch Plan as unworkable, unreasonable, and likely to spark an atomic arms race. Americans, Wallace insisted, were in effect telling the Soviets that “if they are ‘good boys’ we may eventually turn our knowledge over to them…But there is no objective standard of what will qualify them as being ‘good’ nor any specified time for sharing our knowledge.” In reverse circumstances, Wallace insisted, “we would react as the Russians” currently are in the U.N. Coming on the back of the speech, the letter set off an intense media debate.106 Most reporters and several Congressmen, Republicans and Democrats strongly criticized Wallace. Roger Slaughter (D-MO) called Wallace’s position a “new low in cowardice so far as our foreign policy is concerned” and Senator Allen J. Ellender (D-LA) added that

has been no change in the established foreign policy of our Government. There will be no significant change in that policy without discussion and conference among the President, the Secretary of State, and Congressional leaders.” See “The President’s Press Conference,” in PPP, Harry S. Truman, 1946, pp. 426-429.

he did “not think [Wallace] acted gracefully in the matter, considering his post.” In light of the upcoming elections, Republicans tried to tie Wallace to Truman with Robert Taft insisting that the President had “attempted to play both ends against the middle – to appeal to the left wing with Wallace’s favorable words about Russia while appealing to the more conservative sentiment by supporting Secretary Byrnes.” Several church groups, a few left leaning Congressmen, as well as Eleanor Roosevelt backed Wallace’s argument but this was clearly a minority position. As was so often the case, Walter Lippmann summed up the chaos the best, insisting that America and the Administration had simply “lost face” and that clarity in foreign affairs was now needed.107

In that context, Truman asked for – and got – Wallace’s resignation on September 20.108 Faced with opposition from prominent members of his cabinet and from a Republican Party already looking very strong in the upcoming midterm elections, he must have felt a need to exorcise the problem. On September 17, and again a week later, Baruch submitted classified letters to the President clarifying the American policy position on the internationalization of atomic weapons and explaining at length what he deemed to be the erroneous nature of Wallace’s interpretations. The letters reflected his frequently stated view that Americans could not in good faith compromise its monopoly on nuclear weapons. At heart, Truman agreed with Baruch’s view. An avid reader of history, he believed that modern man needed to draw lessons from the past. As a result,

108 For Truman’s recollection of the events see his Memoirs, Years of Decision, vol. I, pp. 555-560.
he was determined that the internationalization of atomic weapons should not bear “a
strong resemblance to the many abortive and ineffectual agreements of the past for
disarmament or non-aggression.”

Even so, Truman struggled to balance his own belief that cooperation remained
attainable with the ever-present signs that Washington’s relationship with Moscow was
deteriorating. He still clung to the hope that the United States could find common ground
with Stalin. This was why he had invited the Soviet leader to Washington. It was also
likely why he had kept advisors like Wallace and Joseph Davies around well into
1946. The President’s doubts were not lessened when four days after Wallace departed
the cabinet, Clark Clifford handed Truman a report that he, at the President’s request, had
worked on for almost two months alongside White House Naval aide George Elsey.
Based on opinions from across the military branches, the Department of War, and the
Department of State—including the expertise of George Kennan—the top secret report
made for grim reading. Analyzing the future of U.S.-Soviet relations, the Clifford-
Elsey Report concluded that Moscow was preparing for a potential military confrontation
with the U.S. and was not intent on improving relations. It warned that traditional

109 “Bernard Baruch to President Truman” September 17, 1946.” HSTL, Clark Clifford Papers, Box 1.
“Memorandum for the President” September 24, 1946, HSTL, Clark Clifford Papers, Box 1. For Truman’s
view of lessons from the past see his Memoirs, vol. I, Years of Decision pp. 119-121; Diary Entry January
1-2, 1952 in Ferrell, Off the Record, pp. 224-225; David C. McCullough, Truman (Simon and Schuster,
110 Joseph Davies had replaced William Bullitt as FDR’s Ambassador to Moscow. He was known to be on
very good – too good according to some – terms with the Soviet political leadership. Nevertheless, he
brought a degree of balance and insight to the Truman Administration, particularly during the first six
months of 1946.
111 For examples of Clifford’s requests for information, see “Clifford to Admiral Leahy, July 18, 1946.”
HSTL, George M. Elsey Papers Box 63; “Clifford to Ambassador Edwin Pauley,” July 20, 1946, Ibid. For
a careful description of the report’s composition see, John Acacia, Clark Clifford: The Wise Man of
communist goals of world domination were the primary influence on Soviet foreign policy and that all members of the American Communist Party were in effect agents of the Soviet Union. The report recommended a toughening up of American foreign policy, insisting that “the language of military power is the only language disciples of power politics understand.” 

Referencing the Churchillian logic from Fulton, previously dismissed by Truman, Clifford and Elsey concluded that if Americans were to find “it impossible to enlist Soviet cooperation in the solution of world problems, we should be prepared to join with the British and other Western countries in an attempt to build up a world of our own which will pursue its own objectives.”

Truman read the Clifford-Elsey report on the evening of September 24. At seven the next morning, he instructed Clifford to bring all copies of the report to the Oval Office. Here he cautioned Clifford that the report was not to be discussed or leaked. It never was while Truman remained in office. The President did not share its contents with the military or with his three most high-profile advisors on foreign affairs: Byrnes, Acheson, and Forrestal. As he insisted to Clifford, if the report was “leaked it would blow the roof off the White House [and] the Kremlin.”

If the Cold War was already underway, as many scholars assume, why then was Truman so concerned with the document’s secrecy? Following the suggestion made by Truman biographer Alonzo

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Hamby, historian John Acacia recently argued that the President buried the report because he worried that Wallace would use its conclusions against him and accuse him of warmongering. This is an unconvincing argument, however, for which there is no documentary evidence. Not only does it fail to explain why the President would withhold the report from his trusted foreign policy team, it assigns Wallace more influence than he possessed. If anything, Truman’s firsthand congressional experience would have taught him that the public and Congress rallied around the President in times of international crisis; any accusations from Wallace would have fallen on deaf ears. If anything, domestic political support was sorely needed by Truman in the fall of 1946. The upcoming Congressional elections were largely considered a referendum on Truman’s performance and with his approval ratings hovering in the low thirties, publicizing the report’s findings would have likely provided the Party a welcome boost. Whatever his reasons for keeping it secret, Truman’s decision clearly demonstrates that he was not ready for conflict with the Soviet Union, whether hot or cold.

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Throughout 1946 Americans inside and outside the government worried increasingly about the global situation. William Bullitt, the former Ambassador to Moscow, criticized both Truman and FDR’s record of collaboration with Stalin. He claimed that as early as “the autumn of 1945” it had been clear, “except to those who did not wish to see, that the Soviet Union had replaced Germany as the embodiment of totalitarian imperialism.” Reinhold Niebuhr held a similarly grim view. Arguing for a stronger American

115 The election results clearly illustrated Truman’s need for support. The Democratic Party lost 55 seats in the House, 12 in the Senate, and control of both chambers of Congress.
commitment to Western Europe, he emphasized, as he had so often done, that one world visions in general ignored the realities of power and “the tragic aspects of human existence.”

Others simply worried about the United Nations’ ability to balance international affairs in light of the Security Council veto. As highlighted in chapter three, Americans had opposed the Soviet veto demands during the wartime negotiations. Early in the Truman Administration they had in fact considered an amendment to the Charter on this issue. During the first U.N. General Assembly in January, Byrnes explained to Truman, however, that while he favored a change to the veto rules, “it would be a mistake six months after the Charter was submitted to the Senate and even before the organization starts operating, to agree to a change.” However, thirteen Soviet vetoes over the course of 1946 – France was the only other power to use its veto even once – reinforced the concern over the permanent members’ veto prerogative.

Despite these concerns, few spoke as of yet of a coming universal struggle about ways of life. Regardless of Moscow’s ideology Americans remained committed to collaboration with the Soviet Union and they maintained a commitment, by scholars often underappreciated, to the United Nations and to a unified world. The American public in particular continued to believe in the United Nations as the most likely avenue to obtaining peaceful relations in the world. As late as August 1946, a New York Herald


Tribune poll found that forty-seven percent of Americans favored the proposal that all nations hand over to the U.N “all their military information and secrets, and allow continuous inspection.” Only thirty-seven percent opposed. On November 5, voters in Massachusetts were asked if they supported their Senator being “instructed to vote to request the President and the Congress of the United States to direct our delegates to the United Nations to propose or support Amendments to its charter which will strengthen the United Nations and make it a World Federal Government able to prevent war.” In the Bay State, this measure got the backing of almost ninety percent of the 700,000 votes cast. Even setting aside the loaded language and Massachusetts’ progressive traditions, the vote was a demonstrative show of support for the U.N and the internalization of law and cooperation.

A further sign of the strong significance Truman attached to the United Nations was his selection of the highly respected veteran, Senator Warren R. Austin (R-VT), to replace the retiring Edward Stettinius as U.N. Ambassador in the summer of 1946. A resolute internationalist, Austin had, through trial by fire, become a Senate powerhouse on foreign affairs. During World War II, the Republican Party ridiculed Austin for his support of FDR. Nevertheless, he won many admirers when, on the Senate Floor, he fired back at his own party leadership insisting that contrary to their views, “there are many worse things than war. A world enslaved by Hitler is much worse than war, it is worse than death. And a country whose boys will not go out and fight to save Christianity and

118 Cantrill, Public Opinion, p. 917.
119 On this issue, see Warren Austin’s correspondence between J. Clark from the law firm Root, Ballatine, Harlan, Busby and Palmer from November 1946. WRAP, Box 39. See also the data collections in Baratta, The Politics of World Federation, p. 559.
the principles of freedom from the ruthless destruction of a fiend – well, you won’t find such boys in America.” Walter Lippmann was delighted with Truman’s choice. He congratulated Austin, certain that he would become “a tower of strength in the Security Council,” and hoped that his appointment signaled that the Senate, under Truman, would become a powerful bastion in the conduct of foreign affairs. Similar praise followed from the soon to be re-elected Senator, Henry Cabot Lodge Jr., John Foster Dulles, Arthur Vandenberg, and many more. The media echoed this view, praising the decision to make Austin the nation’s chief U.N. diplomat.\footnote{Lippmann to Austin, June 6, 1946.} Constitutionality prevented Austin from formally assuming the position until January, and as a result he served, in the interim in an advisor capacity to the career Foreign Service Officer Herschel Johnson.\footnote{Article 1, Section 6, Paragraph 2 of the U.S. Constitution prevents a Senator or Representative from accepting an appointment to a post which he has helped establish while still in office. Since Austin was in the Senate when the U.S. signed the San Francisco Agreement, he was ineligible to assume the post until his term expired on January 3, 1947.}

Over the fall of 1946, Johnson publicly and in the Security Council highlighted the American commitment to the U.N. The organization was, he insisted in an address on CBS, a society of nations “through which the peoples of the world can, if they will, work toward the development of a world society...[It provides] a meeting place for all the world in which every political, economic, and social issue...can be debated and common measures worked out.” To Americans, he insisted, the U.N. represented the “best possible blue-print for the world that ought to be.” In an article published shortly after, he emphasized that the U.N.’s mission included not only “the positive development of
friendly relations between the nations of the world, [but also] the advance of economic, social and cultural standards of humanity and the encouragement and respect for human rights all over the world.” While recognizing that the Security Council did not function perfectly, Johnson saw progress in recent cases that gave him hope for the future of the organization.122

Following Truman’s lead, Johnson declared the “United Nations the corner stone of U.S. foreign policy.” In November, he highlighted America’s global responsibility and the need for the United States to take a leading role in the U.N. Calling for constant cooperation among the great powers, he underlined that “social and economic stability and a growing prosperity” create societies in which “extremism and fanaticism cannot thrive.” To him, it was America’s role “to take the leadership as the strongest member in…world recovery and the promotion of healthy economics everywhere.” On world trade, health, global food supplies, and disease prevention, he insisted that Americans take the lead. He argued that “freedom from fear cannot be won...by unilateral dictatorship; nor permanently by a balance of power.” American economic prosperity, then, must help the United Nations provide “the machinery for international collaboration in the creation of the conditions of health and strength of all communities. The Economic and Social Council…,the Food and Agriculture Organization, the World Bank and Fund and the World Health Organization are now ready to serve this purpose. In these new organizations we will find our greatest hope for peace and security.” Johnson finished his

speech by insisting that “as long as the peoples of the world and the governments of the
great powers are prepared to sacrifice for peace as they did for victory there is reason to
believe in the United Nations. And let the role of the United States in the United Nations
be to resolve firmly to yield second place to no nation in the contribution to organized
peace which we are prepared to make.”\textsuperscript{123}

This was hardly the message of a nation that had adopted a confrontational “get
tough” policy with the Soviet Union. Despite the significant disagreements between the
United States and the Soviet Union during the first eighteen months after the Second
World War ended, this was not a time of ultimatums or of sentiments of good versus evil.
Truman’s decision to secure all copies of the Clifford-Elsey Report reflected – regardless
of where American policy would stand six months hence – the absence of a clear
antagonistic strategy. To insist, as some scholars do, that Americans already found
themselves in a Cold War implies a far more consistent, far more logical, and a more
confrontational American policy than the evidence supports. Any such interpretation
underestimates Americans’ commitment to a functioning international order and the faith
they still placed in the U.N. More significantly, it leads scholars to undervalue the
dramatic transformational impact on American national self-perception when the Cold
War broke out as a result of the Greek crisis the following year. Only with the declaration
of the Truman Doctrine in March of 1947 did Americans cross their Rubicon. Only then,
borne by their exceptionalist ideology, did their national socialization and their
perception of enemies turn what ought to have been a traditional great power struggle for

\textsuperscript{123} Herschel V. Johnson, “The United States Role in the United Nations.” Address in Albany, NY,
November 22, 1946.” HSTL, Herschel V. Johnson Papers, Box 14.
influence and resources into a Manichean struggle between ways of life. The manner and
the ease with which Americans turned their disagreements with the Soviet Union into an
existential conflict provides an avenue for understanding how Americans think of their
role in the world. It is toward this Cold War world—a world created by American
exceptionalist ideology—that we now turn.
George Frost Kennan was the State Department’s most perceptive observer of the Soviet Union. Collectively, his official cables and memoranda, lectures, journal articles, and personal correspondence comprise a detailed and insightful analysis of Moscow’s political and ideological visions unmatched in official or academic circles at any point during the Cold War. Kennan viewed U.S.-Soviet relations as complex and challenging. The combination of Communism and Russian nationalism, he frequently warned, made a continuation of the U.S.-Soviet wartime alliance illusionary. Concerned about the spread of Communism, Kennan advocated a policy of both firmness and patience that was designed to confront the Soviets “with superior strength at every juncture where they might otherwise be inclined to encroach upon the vital interests of a stable and peaceful world.” As he advised Under Secretary of State Dean Acheson in the summer of 1946, if Americans “keep cool, avoid hysteria…[and] keep a steady hand,” the international situation would remain stable.

Kennan’s advice to avoid hyperbole and unnecessary confrontation was sound. At the same time, however, it also highlighted his Achilles heel as a U.S. foreign policy analyst: he knew the Russian mind, but he understood little of the American. While his

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2 George F. Kennan Lecture, “Trust as a Factor in International Relations,” Yale University, New Haven, CT, October 1, 1946, quoted in Gaddis, George F. Kennan, p. 245. George Kennan to Dean Acheson, “Draft of Information Policy on Relations with Russia,” July 1946. HSTL, Dean Acheson Papers, Box 27.
realist foreign policy orientation – one he shared with Lippmann, Niebuhr, and the political scientist Hans Morgenthau – recognized the “short-term trends of public opinion and…the erratic and subjective nature of public reaction to foreign-policy questions,” Kennan overestimated the extent to which national fear, passion, and instinct could be controlled. \(^3\) Once it became established dogma that international Communism challenged the U.S.-made world order, the *genus Americanus* made it nearly impossible for Americans to be persuaded to view the Soviet Union as a mere political adversary. The cultural and historical consciousness that made up American ideology ran too deep for the nation to maintain the balanced approach to international relations that Kennan favored. In effect, he was asking Americans to be something they were not. Instead, Americans came to view the Soviet Union as an absolute nemesis with which there could be no permanent modus vivendi. It was a remarkable shift from the first eighteen months of the postwar era during which the U.S. sought cooperation with Moscow in establishing the post-war order. But it was the only position American ideology would allow for. To the vast majority of Americans, an adversary with universalist aspirations equal to their own could not be considered anything but a threat to the American way of life.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, improved access to the archives of the former Eastern bloc has strengthened the orthodox interpretation that predominant responsibility for the Cold War rests with Stalin. European historians, in particular, have powerfully shown that in the absence of an American commitment to the European democracies, the iron curtain would have moved westward. We now know that Stalin had

\(^3\) Kennan, *American Diplomacy, 1900-1950*, pp. 91-103.
drafted a master plan for a future Germany united under Communist rule long before the Western powers created the Federal Republic of Germany in 1949. We also know that he desired the permanent Sovietization of Western Europe, a reality only prevented by the British and American armies reaching Brussels, Paris, and Copenhagen before the Red Army. It is equally clear that these Communist goals remained intact after the war’s end.4

Stalin’s need for influence and control in Europe, along with the influence of Marxist-Leninist ideology on his global views, compelled him to reject participation in the American-designed international economic order. Despite the obvious financial and humanitarian advantages cooperation with the liberal democracies under the Bretton System would have brought to the citizens of the war ravaged Soviet Union, Stalin rejected reforms and instead used much needed funds and resources to pursue the development of atomic weapons. He unquestionably understood that concessions to the western powers would have endangered his own stranglehold on power and the political ideology and party that ruled his nation. For reasons of security and ideology – two issues that were never quite separable in Moscow – this was a risk he was not willing to take. Instead, Stalin tightened his grip on power and sought to extend Soviet influence in Turkey and Iran, and via Balkan proxies support Communist insurgents in Greece. At the

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same time, he covertly sought similar political changes via Western European Communists whose unwavering allegiance Moscow expected.\(^5\)

Yet even if responsibility for the destruction of the American idealized one-world order and ultimately the Cold War rests with Moscow, we must look to the United States to explain why the Cold War became the kind of ideological conflict it did after 1947. “Theoretically,” as Henry Kissinger has speculated, “it might have been possible to consolidate a united front among the democracies while conducting negotiations with the Soviet Union about an overall settlement” on global issues.\(^6\) After all, traditional great powers had, in the past, often sought grand bargains as they divided influence and carved up continents. A less ideological protagonist might have pursued such a course. But the United States was no ordinary power. Americans’ ideology led them to forcefully respond to Stalin’s challenge as a threat to their nation’s global mission. As President Truman put it, “the world today looks to us for leadership because we have so largely realized, within our borders, those benefits of democratic government for which most of the peoples of the world are yearning…[our] foreign policy is the outward expression of the democratic faith we profess.”\(^7\) Historians are often tempted to dismiss such rhetoric as self-congratulatory hyperbole. The American foreign-policy record certainly is sufficiently tainted by its collaboration with less than honorable regimes to justify such a dismissal. Yet, if we too casually reject Americans’ principled language as a purely rhetorical means to an end, we are likely to lose sight of its deep cultural and historical

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roots and, in the process, miss something fundamental about how Americans perceive themselves and how they in turn perceive others.

Historian Frank Costigliola recently encouraged scholars to stress the human side of foreign policymaking, arguing that individual emotions heavily influenced Truman’s cabinet as its members wrestled with the global role inherited from FDR. This emphasis on personalities and individual beliefs is to be applauded as it can help bring another intellectual layer to diplomatic history that has too often been absent. Still, while such a method can yield dividends when attempting to explain political decision-making, there is a danger in assigning individuals excessive influence in the formation of foreign policy. It was not simply the absence of a Metternich or a Castleragh that caused the Cold War, after all. The individuals in Truman’s cabinet were heavily influenced by American historical and cultural consciousness. Their socialization inspired them – like generations before or since – to view the United States as the indispensable nation with universal democratic responsibilities. This American cultural self-perception heavily influenced individuals’ views of the Cold War, and helped make the Cold War a cold war. Truman’s ideologically infused language cited above, it is significant to note, did not serve as a manipulative device to seduce or persuade the American public. Americans willingly embraced it because they already inhabited it. It was part of their long national heritage described in chapter two. It had been brought to life long before Truman’s tenure and it would outlive his time in the Oval Office. It reflected American sentiments about the

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8 Frank Costigliola, *Roosevelt’s Lost Alliances: How Personal Politics Helped Start the Cold War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011). Although approached from a different angle, Melvyn Leffler similarly argues – though exaggerated in my view – that personalities were the driving factor of the Cold War’s origins. For this view, see his *For the Soul of Mankind*, pp. 11-83, particularly, pp. 79-83.
nation’s role in the world and it dictated Americans’ perception of, and response to, external and internal threats. This language encapsulated both a particular sense of mission as well an underlying American cultural struggle with “the other.” The threat of Communism – real or imagined – inspired a language of conflict, of good and evil and of sin and redemption. It cemented the American moral mission for the world as permanent and absolute. In this Americanized global context, a threat to liberty anywhere became a threat to liberty everywhere.

In an echo of 1861, Americans – as Anders Stephanson has pointed out – interpreted Stalin’s eventual abandonment of the postwar international order almost as a contractual breach.⁹ Between 1947 and early 1949 this helped ensure that Americans began interpreting the Soviet Union as the incarnation of another threat comparable to Hitler’s Germany rather than simply another great power with which the United States had to contend. Eventually this would lead Americans to abandon normal channels of diplomacy. It initiated the return to American national discourse of a world divided between the enslavers and the free, between the righteous and the sinners. Americans may not have started the Cold War, but it was their ideology that shaped, and nourished it. American exceptionalist ideology made the Cold War about antagonistic ways of life.

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Coincidentally, Greece, the birthplace of democracy, became a principal catalyst for the Cold War in early 1947. The conclusion of the Second World War had given way to civil conflict in Greece, as nationalists and communists vied for power. Historical ties and

⁹ Stephanson, “Liberty or Death,” pp. 81-100.
Allied geo-strategic considerations had originally assigned London the predominant task of maintaining stability in postwar Greece, but the combination of a weakening British economy and the intensifying revolt against the Athens’s government soon upset this arrangement. Aided by Communist governments in Yugoslavia, Albania, and Bulgaria, the insurgency threatened the conservative Athens regime’s existence. Despite its influence within these countries, Moscow took no steps to contain the situation. Coming on the backdrop of the previous year’s Near East crises, the Greek situation by 1946 raised instant red flags both in London and Washington.\(^{10}\)

Over the fall, events here reignited the old American interwar fear that miserable conditions created fertile breeding ground for ideologues’ false promises. Conditions in Greece rivaled the worst in Europe. Heavy fighting and a ruthless occupation by the Germans had devastated both industry and infrastructure. Three thousand villages were destroyed, a quarter of the population was homeless, and more than eight percent of the population lay dead.\(^{11}\) In October 1946, Loy Henderson, the Director of the State Department’s Office of Near Eastern and African Affairs (NEA), predicted that without international aid the Communists would triumph. If Greece fell, he explained, a similar outcome was likely to follow in Turkey. Although concerned, Dean Acheson was

\(^{10}\) Yugoslavia had an interest in Greece that extended beyond Communist ideological goals. Unlike Albania and Bulgaria, the Yugoslavs, under Marshal Josis Broz Tito, had secured their own liberation from Nazi occupation and, as such, possessed greater independence from Moscow. Tito remained loyal to Stalin’s interests in Europe until 1948, but he was as much a nationalist as he was a Communist. As a result, he was primarily concerned with the establishment of Yugoslavian influence in the Balkans rather than with the spread of Communism.

unreceptive to the NEA’s recommendation of unilateral American support for Greece. The Truman Administration still considered the U.N. to be the primary vehicle for setting up and executing its international policies, and, as a result, pressed for Security Council involvement. Under Article 34 of the Charter, the Americans argued that the increase in cross-border shootings in the Balkans was “likely to endanger the maintenance of international peace” and recommended an exploratory investigation of the situation. Although no member of the Council denied the accuracy of this conclusion, the Soviet representative vetoed the American proposal because it did not single out Greece as the aggressor against the other Balkan nations. The absence of evidence to support the Soviet accusations caused the interim U.S. Ambassador to the U.N., Herschel Johnson, to publicly condemn Moscow’s stance as an irresponsible politicization of the United Nations. The lifeblood of the organization, he insisted, rested on the veto being “the rare exception to the rule.”

American press reports throughout the fall highlighted violence by leftists against Greek civilians and government institutions as well as the equally violent measures taken by Greek forces. At the same time, Moscow stepped up what can only be described as a one-sided, public denunciation of Greece in the U.N. General Assembly and in the Soviet

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13 “Records of United Nations Security Council Meeting, September 18, 1946,” HSTL, Herschel V. Johnson Papers, Box 16. In an attempt to turn the tables, the Soviet Union proposed a counter-resolution naming Greece the aggressor nation. It was voted down 9-2. Only Communist Poland voted with the Soviet Union. The deadlock in the Council caused the U.N. Secretary General, Trygve Lie, to ponder that he, on his own merit, could launch an inquiry. For more on this, see, “U.N. Council Drop Vote on Greece, due to Veto,” The Washington Post, September 21, 1946.
press. The Soviets accused the regime in Athens of being “chauvinistic, imperialist and aggressive” and an obstacle to the true wishes of the Greek people. In early November, the U.S. Navy made symbolic good-will calls in Turkey and Greece, repeating a gesture executed during the Turkish crisis. That same week, The Saturday Evening Post ran a long story, complete with powerful images, exposing the Communists’ extensive misuse of UNRRA relief-aid in neighboring Yugoslavia, along with the deliberate attempts of the regime there to deceive the population regarding the aid’s country of origin. American faith in the international order appeared increasingly misplaced.

Sumner Welles, now a private citizen, writing in the Washington Post, echoed the American government’s frustration with the international community’s impotence. If the U.N. proved unwilling to act, FDR’s former confidante recommended unilateral American support for Greece. Chastising Moscow for blocking the U.N. investigation, Welles warned that the reality of the veto made it “improbable that the Security Council” under present conditions could “undertake any official or impartial investigation of the facts.” As one of the diplomats involved in the early negotiations that established the postwar order, he understood that the American compromise on the veto had been intended to afford the permanent Security Council members a measure with which to protect themselves. He viewed any attempt by the great powers to use the veto to block an investigation not to their liking as behavior inconsistent with the spirit of the

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16 “Sellout in Yugoslavia,” The Saturday Evening Post, November 2, 1946.
international organization. He concluded by reminding his readers that while the Soviet Union could veto any Security Council action, it could not block a Greek request for a hearing in front of the Council.17

Despite this public American stance, the Greek situation was not entirely black and white. Although formally elected in 1946, the Konstantinos Tsaldari government was no model democracy. In addition, the British, in part as a result of the percentages agreement Churchill had struck with Stalin in 1944 and in part at the request of the local government, maintained a degree of involvement not wholly within the spirit of the new international order.18 Tsaldari remained, nevertheless, the official representative of the Greek people, and on December 13 he took Greece’s case to the U.N. In front of the Security Council, he formally charged the countries of Yugoslavia, Albania, and Bulgaria with “lending their support” to Communist guerilla attacks against Greek territory. Citing over thirty instances of infiltration and interventions from neighboring territories against Greek soil, the Athens’s representative charged that the U.N. could not “permit a few dealers in ideology [to] receive assistance from foreign countries for imperialistic ends…For in that event responsibility would rest upon all the United Nations, and in

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17Sumner Welles, “Greek Crisis: U.N. Must Investigate Revolt,” The Washington Post, December 4, 1946. At the San Francisco Conference in 1945 it was only the intense American pressure against Molotov that had prevented the realization of the Soviet demand that permanent members could veto not only U.N. Security Council action but also which cases would come before the Council.
18 In the fall of 1944, Winston Churchill and Josef Stalin discussed the future division of Eastern Europe and the Balkans. Britain received pre-dominant postwar influence in postwar Greece while Stalin did so elsewhere in Eastern Europe. Roosevelt’s view of the agreement, which was signed just as German forces evacuated Greece leaving a potentially dangerous vacuum of power in the Balkans, reflected immediate concerns regarding the region’s future and likely also the memories of the Great War generation to which he belonged. “My interest at the present time in the Balkan area is that such steps as are practicable should be taken to insure against the Balkans getting us into a future international war, he wrote Stalin.” His emphasis on “the present time” implies that this was not to be the final word in the matter. For more see, Kimball, The Juggler, pp. 159-183.
particular upon the Great Powers.” 19 The Greek case represented a new challenge to the international community.

As the crisis progressed, Americans increasingly fretted over the development of a proper foreign policy strategy. The Alsop brothers despairingly reported in the *Washington Post*, shortly after the Greek hearing, that “[K]eeping your fingers crossed cannot be described as having a policy in the field of world relations…, however, crossed fingers seem to be the only visibly American response” to Soviet policies. Support for Greece, they concluded, was not enough; the United States needed a program to provide support “on a much larger scale, in all economic and political soft spots.” 20 At that time, however, there was no sign that such a program was in the making. Encouragement, in any case, followed on December 19 when, after a heated debate in the Security Council, the Soviet Union – now under mounting international pressure – chose not to veto an American-backed measure to send a limited observer mission to the Balkans to seek further information. 21 Elated American reporters viewed this development as a sign of rediscovered “big power harmony.” The *Washington Post* concluded that Moscow was not “prepared to do anything that would cast doubt on her new policy of cooperation with the west.” Even Walter Lippmann was optimistic. He viewed it as a “stabilization of the balance of power” and a clarification of “the limits of the sphere of influence established

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at the end of the war. The State Department too greeted the move with relief, hoping it was a sign of improved relations with Moscow. In November, and again in late December, Under Secretary of State Dean Acheson informed the NEA and Lincoln MacVeagh, the U.S. Ambassador to Athens, that in order to avoid provoking the Soviet Union, Americans would not extend further unilateral aid to Greece. For now, the matter would be left for the international community to deal with.

In January 1947, Secretary of State Byrnes appointed Mark Ethridge as the primary American delegate to the United Nations Balkan Committee investigating the Greek matter. He had formerly served the State Department in Romania and Bulgaria and had been part of the unsuccessful effort to obtain Moscow’s approval of democratic postwar elections in the Balkans. Despite this previous failure, Ethridge remained optimistic that the U.N. could solve the Greek crisis. As was the case for so many, however, frustration soon replaced optimism. He later recalled that the Soviets, in an attempt to place the sole blame on the Greek government, did everything they could to keep the observers in the capital. They resisted “very strongly our moving even to Salonika… they resisted our moving around…They resisted very strongly our going into Yugoslavia or into Bulgaria.” The Soviets were certain, Ethridge reported to the State Department, “that Greece is ripe plum ready to fall into their hands in a few weeks.”

Awaiting the inevitable Communist takeover, the Soviet delegation, was simply stalling for time.\textsuperscript{24}

Under these circumstances, the disagreement between Washington and Moscow over Greece’s future was bound to cause conflict and dismay. That it helped bring about the Cold War, was a reflection of Americans’ growing realization that the United Nations was coming up short and that their vision of a united world was failing along with it. This conclusion accelerated a debate over what the Alsops considered the “greatest unresolved problem of American foreign policy: The relationship between political foreign policy and economic foreign policy.”\textsuperscript{25} Sorting this out fell to George C. Marshall, who, in January 1947, replaced the ailing James Byrnes as Secretary of State. Marshall was adamant that international organizations could not provide the support required to save Greece from Communism.\textsuperscript{26} He believed, along with the Greek Director General of Housing and Reconstruction, Constantinos Doxiadis, that UNRRA was “a first aid program and nothing else.” UNRRA could “provide food and supplies, but it could not ensure Greece’s recovery from the triple blow of war, occupation, and civil strife. To

\textsuperscript{24} Oral History Interview with Mark F. Ethridge. HSTL, Oral History Collection. A frustrated Ethridge wrote at the time that the Commission was only able to extend its inquiries after “Soviets and Poles helped by their satellite liaison officers had exhausted every means of stalling and after I had spent three hours with [the Soviet Representative] in which he advanced every argument for staying in Athens. Believe he gave in only after it had become apparent to him that I would force a vote in Commission which he realized would be 9 to 2.” See, Mark F. Ethridge to the Secretary of State, February 17, 1947, \textit{FRUS} 1947, vol. V, pp. 820-821. See also, “Yugoslavia Linked to ‘War’ on Greece in U.N. Testimony,” \textit{The New York Times}, February, 28, 1947; “Rift in U.N. Inquiry on Balkans Grow: Russian and Yugoslav Balk at Americans’ Questions,” \textit{The New York Times}, March 9, 1947.


\textsuperscript{26} After Byrnes left public office, a dispute arose between the former Secretary of State and President Truman. The animosity caused many to speculate – and Truman, wanting to appear as if his policy toward the Soviet Union had always been resolute, gladly fed that theory in the 1950s – that Byrnes had in fact been fired. For a compelling argument refuting this claim see Miscamble, \textit{From Roosevelt to Truman}, pp. 269-276.
prevent the collapse of the regime, Greece needed funds for importation of goods, rebuilding of industry, direct military assistance, food, the provision of administrators, technicians, [and] economists.” Labeling Greece an “old-fashioned economy…[with] no special aptitude for either politics or rebuilding,” Life magazine made it clear that only the U.S. could rescue the last non-Communist holdout in the Balkans.

By mid-February, the “fingers crossed” policy, nevertheless, remained intact. That all changed, however, when the British Embassy in Washington delivered two memos to the Secretary of State’s office explaining that London would, “be obliged to discontinue the financial, economic, and advisory assistance” they had been providing to Greece and Turkey and urging the United States to provide support in its place. Upon receipt of the memos, Acheson – acting in Marshall’s place while he delivered his first address as Secretary of State at Princeton University – instructed Henderson and his NEA staff to draft an American response as quickly as possible and with utmost secrecy.

As his deputies prepared the new policy initiative, Marshall delivered a speech two hundred miles north of the nation’s capital. An astute student of history, Marshall recalled how no force had been able to step up and rescue the democratic Hellenic world order as Athens declined. Given “the special position that the United States now

27 Oral History Interview with Dr. Constantinos Doxiadis, HSTL, Oral History Collection. Assistant Secretary of State Will Clayton explained to Congress in March that while UNRRA “succeeded in preventing actual starvation, [it] has been far from sufficient to restore Greece to a position where she could become self-supporting…Such assistance can only come from the United States in the time and in the amount required.” For Clayton’s statement, see Assistance to Greece and Turkey, Hearings Before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, March 24, 1947, 80th Congress (1947), pp. 63-69.
occupie[d] in the world,” he argued that it was the American people’s obligation to ensure that such a tragedy would not occur again. Commenting on the speech even Lippmann, otherwise no advocate for American grandiloquence, conceded that there was no “escape from that responsibility…It is impossible to evade the consequences of history, and there is no way in which the United States can stand safely aside and mind its own internal business…while all about it the world sinks into disorder and squalor, and the violence of a desperate struggle for mere existence.”

The NEA’s recommendation in response to the British message paralleled Marshall’s thinking, arguing that American aid to Greece was the only way to prevent “the capitulation of Greece to Soviet domination [which] might eventually result in the loss of the whole Near and Middle East and northern Africa.” Such an outcome, Henderson argued, “would consolidate the position of Communist minorities in many other countries where their aggressive tactics [were] seriously hampering the development of middle-of-the-road governments.”

On February 27, President Truman, Marshall, and Acheson called a meeting of high-ranking Congressmen from both parties to argue the necessity of taking up Britain’s mantle in the Near East. As he had made clear at Princeton, Marshall believed the world had “arrived at a point in history” unparalleled “since ancient times.”

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the public needed to understand that far more than Greece, Turkey, or the Middle East was a stake. According to the State Department’s Joseph Jones, Acheson and Marshall also impressed upon the group that while planning could take place in secrecy, the announcement of aid needed to be public. Similarly, Truman’s Press Secretary Eben Ayers confided in his diary that there was an urgent need for a well composed message that was well-received by the American public and the press. Jones privately and earnestly suggested to Henderson that the forthcoming public announcement tone down the financial aid issue in the Mediterranean crisis and instead “bring in more “the necessity for bolstering democracy around the world.” The decision to take over Britain’s role was, as he explained it, not purely a financial contribution, nor was it an attempt to pull “British chestnuts out of the fire.” As such, the proposal needed to be presented in terms of the mortal danger the spread of communism posed to “democracies throughout the world.” In Acheson’s words, the “public presentation” should not target the Soviet Union specifically, instead it should emphasize “the concept of individual liberty…the protection of democracies everywhere.” It was not “a matter of vague do-goodism,” but rather “a matter of protecting our whole way of life and of protecting the nation itself.”

Jones’ recommendation, echoed by others, constituted the core of the early drafts that the

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33 On the concern for the press’ reaction to the speech, see Eben A. Ayers, diary entries from the first two weeks of March. HSTL, Eben A. Ayers Papers, Box 20.
34 “Joseph M. Jones to Loy Henderson, February 28, 1947.” HSTL, Joseph M. Jones Papers, Box 6. “Draft of Meeting Notes between Congressional leaders and the State Department February 27, 1945.” Ibid. Historians have often cited Arthur Vandenberg, present at this meeting, as having advised Truman to “scare the hell out of the country,” but recent scholarship seriously questions whether any such comments were actually made during the meeting. On this, see, Denise M. Bostdorff, Proclaiming the Truman Doctrine: The Cold War Call to Arms (Texas A & M university Press, 2008), pp. 68-72.
State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee (SWNCC) and the White House prepared in the ensuing days.

A cynical interpretation of these proceedings might suggest that the Truman Administration simply exaggerated the democratic ideals behind the proposal in an effort to sell their message to the people. Certainly they were aware that the regime they were about to bail out had a tarnished record, but this is not enough to explain the intense ideological nature of the policy and its presentation to the public. As outlined in chapter two, there was an extensive precedent—set by many past administrations, congressmen, intellectuals, and reporters—of promoting interventions on behalf of freedom and the protection of American values. The decision to define involvement in the Greek affair on behalf of freedom, therefore, reflected a pattern that had been present in American ideological thinking for almost two centuries; it was not a new message. What was new, however, was that Americans, for the first time, had the power to execute their ideological goals.

The official records, in any case, make it clear that none of Truman’s advisors in the cabinet or in the State Department seriously questioned whether aid to Greece was the right thing. Under Secretary of State Will Clayton, one of the most astute thinkers on U.S.-European affairs during this period, summed up the feeling when on March 5 he privately wrote to Marshal that the “United States must take up world leadership and quickly to avert world disaster.” Elaborating he argued that the people needed to know what was at stake. He was clear, however that, to “shock them, it is only necessary for the
President and the Secretary of State to tell the truth and the whole truth.” Freedom was under threat and the situation demanded American world leadership, he believed.35

Not everybody concurred with the ideological tone of the message being drafted by the SWNCC. George Kennan, soon to be head of Marshall’s new Policy Planning Staff, strongly opposed sending signals that might exacerbate the relationship with Moscow. Instead, he recommended a public announcement “confined largely to the needs of the Greek people.”36 The Soviet leadership’s belief in the ideology of Marxism-Leninism and the task of world revolution, did not, in Kennan’s view, necessitate that Americans up the ante. As he had explained in an address to the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) in January, other Russian traits made it “perfectly possible for the U.S…to contain Russian power if it is…done courteously and in a non-provocative way, long enough so that there might come internal changes in Russia.”37 This view reflected his conviction that such matters ought to be left to diplomats rather than politicians. Regional experts, fluent in foreign languages and sensitive to various cultures, possessed a propensity for calm and negotiated solutions that often eluded elected men. Compromise was in the diplomat’s nature, he believed, but not in the elected politician’s.38

38 On Kennan’s overall view of the role diplomats ought to play in foreign policymaking, see his American Diplomacy, 1900-1950, pp. 91-103. Kennan never changed his view. Much later in life, he lamented the
For all his brilliance, Kennan would likely have felt more at home in the eighteenth-and-nineteenth century European courts of diplomacy where foreign policy was conducted away from the public’s eye and from public opinion. He either never truly grasped the arrogance that accompanied American ideology and power or he was unwilling to grapple within that reality. The day before Kennan’s address to the CFR, Truman stressed in his State of the Union Address that global “stability can be destroyed when nations with great responsibilities neglect to maintain the means of discharging those responsibilities...We have a higher duty and a greater responsibility than the attainment of our own national security.” No matter what Kennan may have believed, Americans, including the President, found such a message far easier to embrace than one of calculated compromise. As Life magazine put it, the Soviet Union was “an idea as well as a country...we must win the billion-odd people in the grandstand to our side by a demonstration that ours is the better idea, the better system.”

This was in effect the message that Truman brought to Congress, to the American people, and to the world on March 12, 1947. He ignored the cautious approach favored by Kennan and delivered a grandiose speech that broadened the United States obligation from simply supporting Greece to protecting the entire world from tyranny. Although not a particularly gifted public speaker, Truman’s delivery was resolute. Asking Congress for four hundred million dollars in aid to Greece and Turkey to ensure the survival of those development and condition of the Foreign Service and the government’s inability to make use of its experts. See his, “Diplomacy without Diplomats?,” Foreign Affairs, vol. 76, no. 5 (September 1997), pp. 198-212.

countries as free nations, Truman insisted that among America’s primary objectives in the world was the “creation of conditions in which we and other nations will be able to work out a way of life free from coercion. This was a fundamental issue in the war with Germany and Japan. Our victory was won over countries which sought to impose their will, and their way of life, upon other nations.” Americans must remain committed “to help free peoples to maintain their free institutions and their national integrity against aggressive movements that seek to impose upon them totalitarian regimes.” As Truman interpreted it,

…nearly every nation must choose between alternative ways of life. The choice is too often not a free one. One way of life is based upon the will of the majority, and is distinguished by free institutions, representative government, free elections, guarantees of individual liberty, freedom of speech and religion, and freedom from political oppression. The second way of life is based upon the will of a minority forcibly imposed upon the majority. It relies upon terror and oppression, a controlled press and radio; fixed elections, and the suppression of personal freedoms. I believe that it must be the policy of the United States to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures.40

Thus, Truman’s Doctrine made the protection of global liberty America’s mission to bear. The speech never mentioned the Soviet Union. The message was clear enough. At its core this speech was about the United States and its role in the world. It was a call for Americans to take up what Walt Whitman called “their task eternal.” Eventually this kind of language would be blamed for American interventions in Vietnam and elsewhere around the globe, though this was never something Truman foresaw. Truman did, however, consider his speech the major “turning point in American foreign policy.” The State Department’s Paul Nitze, the man who would later replace Kennan as head of the

40 Harry S. Truman, “Special Message to the Congress on Aid to Greece and Turkey.”
Policy Planning Staff, recalled that the “whole atmosphere in Washington changed overnight.” Historians often present the effect of Truman’s speech in similar terms. Daniel Rodgers, for example, concludes that it defined America as the “free world” responsible for protecting the innocent from the totalitarian other. So it did. But if the idea of American free-world leadership became more pronounced after March 1947, the legacy upon which this declaration of American leadership rested went back all the way to the nation’s founding. If it represented a change in deed, it hardly represented one in thought. Presenting it as a revolution in U.S. foreign policy undervalues the extent to which the message reflected beliefs inherent in the American mind. Truman’s fusion of exceptionalism and duty allowed Americans to embrace the unlimited burden that he laid before them practically without hesitation. What is more, Americans, as shown below, rallied around the belief that the U.S., as one columnist summed it up, “is the key to the destiny of tomorrow; we alone may be able to avert the decline of Western civilization, and a reversion to nihilism and the dark ages.”

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In his biography of Dean Acheson, Robert Beisner insists that Americans never had much faith in the United Nations, with Acheson possessing the least faith of all. John Fousek, in his cultural history of the early Cold War, argues instead that Americans thought of the

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41 Harry S. Truman, *Memoir, Years of Trial and Hope* vol. II (Garden City: Doubleday, 1956), p. 106. Many scholars have shared similar views. See, for example, Daniel Yergin, *Shattered Peace*, pp. 275-302. For Nitze’s comment see , Oral Interview with Paul Nitze, HSTL, Oral History Collection.
44 Beisner, *Dean Acheson*, pp. 51-52.
postwar world as needing either U.N. or American leadership. Both scholars are reading events after the fact. Not only did Americans believe in the U.N. during its early years, they viewed it as an extension – not as an alternative – to U.S. values and policies. They sought for the United Nations to embody the globalization of the freedoms that Paine had dreamt of and that FDR had sought to create. This explains why the single greatest topic of debate in the aftermath of Truman’s speech was whether it was the place of the United States or of the United Nations to undertake the role the President had laid out. Apart from on the political fringes, few questioned whether the gauntlet thrown down to totalitarianism was just or necessary. In the end, the conclusion reached by most was, as Assistant Secretary of State Willard Thorp explained on NBC, that only “in a world of free nations can the United Nations carry out the principles on which it was founded…Greece is a small country…In order to be free she needs help. We have proposed that the Congress of the United States authorize that help. An attack on freedom anywhere is an attack on free people everywhere.”

The Truman administration was not giving up on the U.N.; the Greek case merely highlighted the organization’s immediate limitations. Testifying before the House Foreign Relations Committee on March 20, Acheson explained that the United States had taken on the role of provider in Greece, because even “if the project were not blocked by certain members” of the Security Council, the U.N. did not possess the funds, the force, nor the equipment to render emergency aid. One political cartoon depicted this view showing a powerful Uncle Sam holding up a newspaper with the headline “U.N. Lacks

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45 “Our Foreign Policy,” NBC, March 15, 1947. HSTL, Joseph Jones Papers, Box 2.
Teeth.” The personification of America looks sternly at a little boy with a U.N. hat and only one small tooth. The cartoon’s caption reads, “It takes time to grow them.” On the same page, in a separate cartoon, a little boy flexes his small muscles and looks admiringly at the strong Uncle Sam as he carries the globe on his shoulders. Americans, as U.S. Ambassador Warren Austin explained to the Security Council on March 28 regarded “it as an obligation under the Charter, as well as a matter of elementary self-interest for every member of the United Nations to do its utmost to bring about a peaceful adjustment of any international situation before it become a threat to the peace.” The program he insisted was, of “an emergency and temporary character,” to serve only until the “United Nations and its related agencies” could assume responsibilities. Americans still believed in the fundamental ideals of the United Nations – a Gallup poll six month later confirmed that eighty three percent of Americans wanted an even stronger U.N. – but for now they did not have confidence in the organization’s immediate strength.47

While most inside and outside of the government had come to accept this reality, many were still not convinced that the U.S. should step up in its place. In his diary, David Lilienthal recorded the “air is full of dispute and discussion over Truman’s bold proposal that we (not the United Nations but the United States on its own) move into Greece and in effect rebuild it and protect it from Soviet coercion.”48 In his evaluation of the situation at the end of the month, Joseph Jones agreed, concluding that the “largest basis of

criticism is the Administrations ‘failure’ to take the problem to the U.N.” This criticism was, he explained, “leveled not only by opponents, but by some supporters and by others who do not commit themselves on either side.”  

Among those who worried was Eleanor Roosevelt. Her stature in the country and the world had only risen in the aftermath of FDR’s death and she had, under Truman, become America’s most forceful advocate of the internationalization of human rights in the United Nations. She cherished the idea of an international order and she worried that Truman might not have given it adequate time. In a long personal letter, Truman explained to her that while he agreed with her assessment that the world needed “a democratic, constructive and affirmative program of wide scope,” he also believed that the U.S. had “helped to build” and had “made clear to all who [would] understand, the most comprehensive machinery for a constructive world peace based on free institutions and ways of life that has ever been proposed and adopted by a body of nations.” “I would urge,” he continued “that in evaluating the step we are about to take, we should keep clearly in mind all the effort this country has engaged in sincerity to make possible a peace economically, ideologically, and politically sound.”

The United States had created the United Nations to handle international disputes as an extension of American ideals and interests. If it could not, he believed it was America’s duty to go it alone. Truman had no regrets over his message to Congress.

The debate over a U.S. versus a U.N. role was a topic of discussion in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee as well. While he backed the president’s request for aid to

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49 “Summary,” March (n.d.), HSTL, Joseph M. Jones Papers, Box 2.
50 “Harry S. Truman to Eleanor Roosevelt, May 7, 1947,” in Steve Neal ed. Eleanor & Harry, pp. 96-99. Truman was responding to a concerned inquiry from Mrs. Roosevelt regarding the Truman Doctrine. For this, see “Eleanor Roosevelt to Harry S. Truman, April 17, 1947,” Ibid, pp. 94-96.
Greece and Turkey, Committee Chairman Arthur Vandenberg professed uncertainty as to what it all meant. “If we falter in our leadership, what happens? It may endanger the peace of the world,” began the Michigan senator. The development left him pondering, however, for “if the peace of the world is not the jurisdiction of the United Nations fundamentally, and if our obligations to the United Nations do not cover the peace of world, I do not know what the hell they do cover, and I do not know why there should be a United Nations nor why we should be in it.”51 The more committed Republican internationalist on the Committee, and Vandenberg’s close friend, Henry Cabot Lodge Jr., was less concerned about the U.N. role. In his view, the matter was simple. He had already publicly backed the President insisting that globally Americans were now “deeply involved from a material, spiritual, and an ideological standpoint.” In the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, he seconded Vandenberg’s support for Truman and rallied the others, exclaiming: “Now we have a choice…whether we are going to repudiate the president and throw the flag on the ground and stamp on it or whether we are not. It seems to me those are the horns on the dilemma we are on, and to me it is not a hard decision to make.”52

Unsurprisingly, Ohio Senator Robert Taft shared few of these sentiments. Although he eventually voted for the aid package to Greece and Turkey, he did so with

52 “Statement by Senator Lodge’s Office, March 15, 1947,” HCL Papers, MHS, Carton 2; Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr., “Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, April 2, 1947,” HCL Papers, MHS, Carton 14. Lodge has been largely overlooked by U.S. diplomatic historians of the early Cold War. This reflects, perhaps, the fact that most scholars still pay limited attention to the domestic side of the equation or limit their attention solely to the heads of the GOP. This is unfortunate, because Lodge, like Warren Austin, was a formidable force and entirely uninterested in partisanship.
much reluctance. He viewed the Truman Doctrine as a “complete departure from previous American policy” and reiterated that even if he did vote for aid, it would not mean carte blanche for the execution of similar policies elsewhere in the world.53 He worried that Truman might initiate an open-ended commitment to other nations as well. Walter Lippmann shared this concern, questioning whether this sentimental adaptation of moral principles might tempt Americans to “reinforce every theater, to fill every vacuum of power and restore at one and the same time the whole shattered economic life of Europe and Asia.”54 On this rare occasion, Henry Wallace shared Taft’s and Lippmann’s fears. Less than a month after his dismissal from the Truman administration in September 1946, Wallace had taken over as editor of the *New Republic*. In early 1947, he presided over the formation of Progressive Citizens of America (PCA), an organization of left leaning liberals, trade unionists, laborers, as well as intellectuals and artists committed to challenging Truman’s foreign policies and improving conditions for the working class at home. In the aftermath of the Truman Doctrine he warned that following Truman’s speech “every reactionary government and every strutting dictator will be able to hoist the skull and bones and demand that the American people rush to his aid.”55 Time would prove Taft, Lippmann, and Wallace right.

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55 Henry Wallace, “The Fight for Peace Begins,” *New Republic* CXVI, March 24, 1947. Others remained similarly unpersuaded albeit for different reasons. Wallace was not alone in challenging Truman’s speech. As John Fousek explains, African Americans across the political spectrum challenged global interventions on behalf of democracy, arguing that its focus ought to be on America’s domestic failings rather than those of others. NAACP Executive Secretary Walter White sarcastically remarked that having “failed miserably
Despite the prominence of all three men, opposition to Truman’s Doctrine never truly gathered steam. Though Wallace would shake up the presidential race in 1948, he was increasingly isolating himself on the left. A similar development was occurring on the right for Robert Taft and the posse of Republicans opposed to a growing global American role. Ever since the “march of the elephants,” as the GOP’s ballot box grab in November 1946 was sometimes called, an internal revolution had been underway within the party. Though Taft remained the most powerful Republican figure in the Senate, his influence had begun to slip markedly. With regards to foreign affairs in particular, he represented an ever narrower constituency of the GOP. Within a few short years, the internationalists, led by Lodge, would challenge Taft’s leadership, excise the last remnants of isolationism, and bring the GOP into the far more liberal and progressive Eisenhower era.\textsuperscript{56}

Historians should not mistake this limited opposition, however, as a sign of popular enthusiasm over the international developments. Even though Gallup reported that the American public supported the Truman Doctrine by a two-to-one margin, many supporters remained cautious and concerned about what might follow. Nonetheless, the national mood gradually swung the President’s way. The reason for this is that although Truman clearly extended American commitments, he was not – despite Taft’s claims – charting a new course for America. There was a genealogy to the Truman Doctrine’s language that Americans were easily swept away by. His insistence that only Americans

\textsuperscript{56} Holm, “Also Present at the Creation,” pp. 217-227.

\textsuperscript{56} Holm, “Also Present at the Creation,” pp. 217-227.
could remake the world order and deflect totalitarianism was ingrained in the national consciousness. The President tapped into an ideological strain that ran so deep that hardly any Americans questioned or even realized its presence. Consequentially, the public and the media rallied behind the President’s call that circumstances required American leadership on behalf of freedom. In the aftermath of the speech, the White House examined 225 editorials from across the country. Of these, more than half were completely in favor of the President’s suggestions, while only thirteen opposed. Letters and telegrams from the public to the White House reflected a similar trend, with at least three to one in favor of the President’s actions.\(^5\) Opinion polls show slightly less enthusiasm, although they do indicate that approval increased over the course of 1947 and 1948 as the public became more educated on the matter.\(^5\) Generally, Americans came to accept NBC’s early assessment that Truman’s appeal was “a plea to save the American way in the world.”\(^5\)

This acceptance of the Truman Doctrine by the America people helps explain why there was little chance that Congress would not vote in favor of the bill to aid Greece and Turkey. Far more than the fate of Greece and Turkey was at stake. Failure to stand up for freedom meant, in the eyes of many, being on the wrong side of history. In a uniquely American tone, recalling the ideological visions of the nation’s responsibility,

\(^5\) For the collection of letters and telegrams from the public on the Truman Doctrine, see “Message to Congress on Aid to Turkey and Greece, 03/12/1947 [pro]; [con]. HSTL, Harry S. Truman Papers, President’s Personal Papers, President’s Personal File 200.
\(^5\) Memorandum: Public Opinion Survey of Reactions to President Truman’s Proposal Regarding Greece and Turkey, April 16, 1947. HSTL, Harry S. Truman Papers, Central File, Box 38.
Congressmen rallied behind Truman’s message, As Charles Eaton (R-NJ) explained, America was “face to face with the necessity of choosing – and accepting the responsibilities that go with that choice – between slavery and freedom as the foundation of new world civilization.” Walter Andrews (R-NY) went even further, claiming that he had almost favored “the organization of the necessary number of long-range flying atom bomb squadrons so as to enforce our will for justice in torn parts of the world.”

The influential Republican foreign policy expert, John Foster Dulles concurred. He had, as Life magazine reported it “called out again and again for more intellectual and moral vigor in the world leadership which history has thrust upon the U.S.” Dulles defined the struggle ahead as a titanic one. Even before the Truman administration came around to hold similar views, Dulles prophetically announced that once “the full implications of the Soviet system come to be better understood by the American people…it will revive in them the spirit which led their forebears to pledge their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor to secure their personal freedoms.” To Dulles, the battle with the Soviet Union, like earlier American wars, was for a way of life. Acheson too viewed the conflict as essentially a fight for ideas. It pitted a world that believed in “the worth of the individual, the preservation of individual rights and individual

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60 “Public Comments on the President’s Message, March 28, 1947.” HSTL, Joseph Jones Papers, Box 2.
61 “Our Foreign Policy Crisis,” Life, March 17, 1947.
62 John Foster Dulles, “Thoughts on Soviet Foreign Policy and What to Do About It, Part I,” Life, June 3, 1946; John Foster Dulles, “Thoughts on Soviet Foreign Policy and What to Do About It, Part II,” Life, June 10, 1946.
enterprise” against the Soviet “police state...[and its] rigid control and discipline over the individual.”63

The United States was not alone in its concerns about the Soviet Union and its Communist agenda; Western Europeans worried about the Communist threat as well. If anything, they were the ones in the line of fire. But it is telling that in stark contrast to the Americans, the Europeans – Churchill aside – never saw the Cold War as a fight for mankind’s progress. But Americans, the public and the Congress alike, remained convinced that it was their duty to protect the world from the spread of Soviet ideals. On May 9, 1947, the Republican controlled House of Representatives voted 287-107 in favor of Truman’s aid package to Greece and Turkey. The Senate followed suit, voting 63-23.

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The Truman Doctrine destroyed what was left of America’s one-world vision. Throughout the entire Cold War, the United States would never again fully trust that the United Nations could become the sole promoter of American values. Instead, the national rhetoric shifted to emphasize a world divided, a world that could be saved through American leadership alone. In the public, political, and even religious spheres, Americans turned against their former ally, viewing the state of the world as “us” against “them.” This dramatic alteration causes some historians to claim that the Truman Administration eagerly exaggerated the Communist threat to gain public support for its international objectives. These scholars interpret his rhetoric as more dramatized, antagonistic, and

63 Dean Acheson, “Address Made Off the Record Before the Society of Newspaper Editors, Washington, D.C., April 18, 1947.” HSTL, Dean Acheson Papers, Box 69.
often naïve than circumstances called for. Even Wilson Miscamble, a scholar largely favorable toward Truman, insists that that the “grandly universalist terms portraying the issue as a conflict between totalitarian repression and democratic freedom” was “primarily to pry funds from a parsimonious Congress.”

The thesis that Truman oversold the Cold War attracted particular attention from scholars writing after the Cold War ended. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, Moscow’s industrial, scientific, technological, economic, and ideological shortcomings were exposed. In hindsight, such facts made it seem improbable that the Soviet Union was capable of inspiring the emotions and fears its existence stirred in the American mind during the four decades of the Cold War. It is equally inviting to conclude that Truman and subsequent administrations created a behemoth and frightened the American public into the Cold War. That conflict creates political hyperbole is a well-established fact but the argument can easily be pressed too far. Even if the Soviet Union does not appear to have constituted an existential threat during the Cold War’s early years, Moscow’s abandonment of the American-designed world order and its perceived ambitions caused Americans to view the Communists in just such a way. The idea that ideologically minded foes were bent on eradicating the American way of life had a deep tradition in American thought. Emotionally, socially, and ideologically it influenced how Americans

65 Miscamble, From Roosevelt to Truman, p. 310. Media reports from March 1947 make clear that the passage of the aid package to Greece and Turkey was never really in danger. See, for example, “Great Debate over ‘Truman Doctrine’,” The New York Times, March 23, 1947.
inside and outside of government responded to these developments and how they perceived threats.

American historical patterns may help explain why feelings of national anxiety so seamlessly found their way into American national discourse in a way they, for example, never did in any European country. Shortly after Truman’s speech, Secretary of Labor Lewis Schwellenbach stated his support for an outright ban on the American Communist Party. The move, which prompted the Communist Party to send thirty dimes to Schwellenbach as a symbol of betrayal of labor values, was echoed shortly after by Arthur Vandenberg, Harold Stassen and many others.66 The questionable constitutionality of this particular measure complicated matters, but, as it has before and since, bypassing at least some established civil liberties, nevertheless, proved surprisingly easy. President Truman made use of his presidential prerogative and, on March 21st, issued Executive Order no. 9835 which established a loyalty program to identify and expel communists working in the U.S. government. The order sought to exclude from federal employment anyone with a history of supporting any “foreign or domestic, association, movement, group or combination of persons which the Attorney General” designates “as having adopted a policy of advocating or approving the commission of acts of violence to deny to others their rights (my italics) under the Constitution.”67 The government showed no concern for the civil rights the law violated and even went so far as to claim that the law was aimed at protecting civil rights, not taking them away. The

opposite of course was true. As Lilienthal correctly wrote in his diary, in practical effect, “the usual rule that men are presumed innocent until proven guilty is reversed.”

Though the loyalty act has been roundly criticized by historians, it was neither surprising nor unpopular at the time of its introduction. It reflected a trope in American national self-perception that the freedoms upon which the nation had been founded are always likely to be under threats from outside and from within. As Stephanson explains it, a central part of American national self-perception has always been “the imperative of vigilance for the sake of preserving freedom.” The loyalty law, then, was simply an extension of this perception just as the attacks on suspected loyalists during the Revolutionary War, President Lincoln’s suspension of *Habeas Corpus*, the Wilson Administration’s crackdown on suspected German sympathizers and pacifists, the First Red Scare of the 1920s, and Franklin Roosevelt’s decision to intern Japanese-Americans during the Second World War had also been. Americans justified the threat, whether real or perceived, of Federal employees loyal to the Communist Party and the Soviet Union on the highly ideological notion that their actions were conspiratorial in nature and un-American at heart. Communism was believed to threaten the true America.

This “other’s” perceived challenge to the American core helps explains why opposition, despite the nation’s commitment to civil rights, proved unable to effectively

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69 Stephanson, “Liberty or Death,” p. 87.
70 During the War on Terror, the United States has once again resorted to similar measures with the introduction of the PATRIOT Act and other initiatives. Although terrorists in no way constitute a threat comparable to that of the Confederacy, Hitler’s Germany, or the Soviet Union, the ease with which the American government, in stark contrast to the Western European governments, has bypassed what is traditionally perceived as inalienable rights reveals how prevalent the American fear of enemies is.
challenge the loyalty programs. The editorial board at *The Washington Post*, for example, considered the creation of loyalty boards to test employees’ commitment “a fair and systematic method of dealing with a problem that has long called for vigorous and decisive action.” The newspaper concluded that no “impairment of constitutional rights of free speech will result from the executive order.” The Supreme Court agreed, refusing to review a case in which a Federal Employee had lost his job because of his membership in a “Communist Front” organization. Progressive and labor groups protested but to no avail. The protests of union members, in particular, were fueled by a fear that the previously acceptable political organizations and labor groups they had been a part of during the war would soon come under scrutiny. They worried – rightly so, as events in the coming years would prove – that the loyalty law would quickly stretch beyond the walls of government and that they would be its targets.

Three days after the announcement of E.O. 9835, a former U.S. Ambassador to the Soviet Union and to France, William Bullitt, testified before the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC). Bullitt, by now one of the loudest critics of the previous years’ attempts to work with Moscow, explained that Americans were indeed in an apocalyptic struggle. He warned the Committee that Moscow’s leadership was preparing for a final, inevitable war with the United States. Americans, he argued, found

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72 “Truman Plans to Ask Purge Funds Soon,” *The Washington Post*, March 30, 1947. Less than two weeks after the issuance of Executive Order 9835, Attorney General Tom C. Clark drew up the so-called Attorney General's List of Subversive Organizations (AGLOSO) which became the litmus test for the allowed existence of any group, organization, or club in the country until President Richard Nixon abolished it in 1974.
themselves in a position comparable to that of France in 1936. They were the stronger military power, but a failure to take action against their obvious adversary would lead to certain defeat. Commenting on the domestic situation, Bullitt argued that the Communist Party of the United States was “composed of potential traitors” conspiring “to commit murder” through the liquidation of opposition for the sake of “ultimate dictatorship.” Echoing Kennan’s assessment to Byrnes from 1946, Bullitt concluded that if Stalin “had the atom bomb, it would already have been dropped on the United States.” Even if formally at peace, Communists were participants in a covert war against American ideals. It made a normal relationship with Moscow and those who sympathized with its mission impossible.

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Though the Truman Doctrine was initially aimed at justifying increased aid for Greece and Turkey, it soon became evident that it stretched well beyond crisis management in the Balkans. This stern reality found its most thoughtful, if unintended, expression in an article printed in the July 1947 issue of Foreign Affairs. The author was listed as “X,” but it soon became common knowledge that George Kennan’s sharp pen hid behind that pseudonym. Originally written in January and approved for publication just before Truman’s speech in March, “The Sources of Soviet Conduct,” as Kennan entitled his piece, explained in clear language the political threat the Soviet Union posed to the

Like Kennan’s Long Telegram, the X-article focused primarily on explaining the threat Americans faced, rather than providing concrete policy recommendations for how to respond to it. As such, the article reflected that Kennan, at heart, was an intellectual rather than a policymaker. He brought ideas and concepts to foreign policy but, was not a natural executor or operator.

“The Sources of Soviet Conduct” explained both the historical background behind Moscow’s motivations as well as the impact of Communist ideology on the Soviet regime’s foreign policy. Not unlike his contemporary Hannah Arendt, he believed Moscow’s global quest was driven by a combination of totalitarian ambitions and Communist convictions. Kennan expected the Soviet Union – as he described in one of his many colorful metaphors – to spread its influence like “a fluid stream which moves…until it has filled every nook and cranny,” unless met “with some unanswerable force.” Accordingly, he recommended that the United States apply “counter-force at a series of constantly shifting geographical and political points” to contain Communism’s spread. He did not advocate military involvement against the Soviet Union, nor did he call for military alliances, as he would later feel forced to explain. Kennan argued that “the issue of Soviet-American relations is in essence a test of the overall worth of the United States as a nation among nations. To avoid destruction the United States need only measure up to its own best traditions and prove itself worthy of preservation as a

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great nation.” He concluded, in a manner reminiscent of so many arguing before and after him, with a call to American leadership:

[S]urely there was never a fairer test of national quality than this. In the light of these circumstances, the thoughtful observer of Russian-American relations will find no cause for complaint in the Kremlin's challenge to American society. He will rather experience a certain gratitude to a Providence which, by providing the American people with this implacable challenge, has made their entire security as a nation dependent on their pulling themselves together and accepting the responsibilities of moral and political leadership that history plainly intended them to bear.76

As one recent reviewer of John Lewis Gaddis’ Kennan biography writes, this “patently dishonest curtsy to American exceptionalism was violently at odds with what Kennan believed.”77 And so it was. The language struck a stark contrast to Kennan’s voiced opposition to the Truman Doctrine and appeared, in fact, to be far more in tune with views of a world divided between good and evil, far more in tune with the covenant John Winthrop insisted the Puritans enter into almost four centuries earlier. This language may not have reflected Kennan’s true opinion, but it was an ode to Americans’ belief that the Soviet Union represented a challenge to their freedoms that they had been summoned to defend.

Too much can be read into this odd contradiction between Kennan’s accepted views of American foreign policy and the X-article’s ideological tone. Perhaps the article simply needs to be understood in its proper context. Kennan had written “The Sources of Soviet Conduct” months before the announcement of the Truman Doctrine. On its own, published in a journal with a professional readership and a small circulation, it is unlikely

76 “X” (Kennan), “Sources of Soviet Conduct,” pp. 575-576, 582.
that its message would have been blown out of context. But its delayed publication – purely a reflection of the publishing world’s pace – made it appear to be an endorsement of Truman’s views, an endorsement Kennan had never intended to give. The article set off a debate between Kennan and Walter Lippmann who in “Today and Tomorrow” fired off a series of critical rebuttals of Kennan’s conclusions. In truth, the debate was rather one-sided, since Marshall soon made it clear to Kennan that “planners don’t talk.” As the head of the Policy Planning Staff, Kennan was thereby sidelined from engaging with Lippmann publicly.\(^78\)

Lippmann concurred with the need for containing the Soviet Union, but he chastised Kennan, as he had Truman, for committing the U.S. to unlimited interventions around the world. He worried that sooner or later, regardless of how “undesirable” it might be, Americans would have to either “disown” less than democratic client states or bail them out if they were to remain true to their word. Rather than accept open-ended commitments, Lippmann claimed that the United States ought to support the neutralization of Germany instead. Such a move, he argued, would limit the pressure on Moscow in Europe, lead to the withdrawal of the Red Army from Eastern Europe and the American military from the West and, by extension, resolve the European political crisis. The Soviet Union was, in Lippmann’s misguided interpretation, driven by traditional power politics much more so than by totalitarian desires for control or Marxist ideals.

the U.S. simply pledged itself to containing Communism in Europe through political and economic support, he rather naively prophesized, Moscow and Washington would eventually reach an agreement on mutual disengagement.79

The publication of the X-article, an extended excerpt of which soon appeared in the widely read *Life* and *Reader’s Digest*, made Kennan feel “like one who has inadvertently loosed a large boulder from the top of a cliff and now helplessly witnesses its path of destruction in the valley below.”80 He lamented that the Truman Administration along with many others – including Lippmann – had misunderstood his argument. The irony was that Kennan shared Lippmann’s view of Europe as the central Cold War battleground, just as he agreed that the conflict should not be viewed as a crusade to save an American way of life. This much is evident from PPS/1, the first formal recommendation prepared by the new Policy Planning Staff under Kennan’s guidance. Submitted to Marshall in May, PPS/1 suggested a more cautious policy than what appeared to be on display in the *Foreign Affairs* piece. The paper proposed substantial financial aid to Western Europe not as a supplement to the ideology of the Truman Doctrine, but as a means to *supplant* it. “Steps should be taken,” Kennan argued, “to clarify what the press has unfortunately come to identify as the ‘Truman Doctrine’, and to remove [its] damaging impressions which are current in large sections of American public opinion.” In particular, the paper contended, new aid proposals should

clarify that the Truman Doctrine was not “a blank check to give economic and military aid to any area in the world where the communists show signs of being successful.”

A month later, at the National War College, Kennan argued that the World War II strategy of total war and its demands for “unconditional surrender” had left the victorious powers with “problems and responsibilities” previously unheard of in warfare. Limited “military action and limited post-hostilities commitments,” he believed, might well have been in the national interest. Perhaps, he pondered, “all our plans have been too ambitious. Perhaps we should never have tried to organize all the world into one association for peace, but should have been more modest…Perhaps the whole idea of world peace has been a premature, unworkable grandiose form of daydreaming.” The goal of the war, he believed, should have been to restore a workable balance of power. According to Kennan, excessive moralism and legalism had no place in U.S. foreign policy. This argument revealed the gap that existed between Kennan’s intellectual view of international affairs and the reality of American ideology’s impact on U.S. policy both during and after the Second World War. Kennan’s caution, however wise, simply went against the grain of how Americans perceived their postwar role. If the Cold War had been solely about the containment of Communism, Kennan’s recommendations might have become established policy. To Americans, however, it was about something deeper. It was a war to spread ideas. It was a conflict for an Americanized world order, as much as it was a conflict against international Communism.

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82 Kennan, “Planning of Foreign Policy, Naval War College, June 1947,” reprinted in his Measures Short of War, pp. 206-216.
In this context, it is unsurprising that the Truman Administration adopted Kennan’s proposed aid package to Western Europe while simultaneously ignoring his suggestion that they abandon the Truman Doctrine’s commitments. On June 5, at Harvard University, Marshall presented the outlines of what would become the European Recovery Program (ERP). Europe’s economic plight and the social crisis that accompanied it, he explained, demanded American aid to secure the “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.” In a rebuttal of UNRRA, Marshall clarified that any “assistance that this Government may render in the future should provide a cure rather than a mere palliative. Any government that is willing to assist in the task of recovery will find full co-operation…Any government which maneuvers to block the recovery of other countries cannot expect help from us.” 83 The message reflected the by now familiar American view that desolation provided breeding ground for totalitarianism and that the instability in Europe made it susceptible to Communism just as it had been susceptible to fascism in the previous decade. Economic recovery was America’s remedy. Neither the United Nations nor the IBRD were capable, at present, of providing the funding necessary to implement such a remedy. The feeling was, as Will Clayton expressed it, that “the United States must run this show.” 84

Despite the Truman Doctrine’s division of the world between free and totalitarian states, the American offer of aid included all of Europe. In reality, of course, the Truman

administration had no desire to fund anything east of the iron curtain. Marshall had at first hesitated to include the Communist nations of Eastern Europe in the offer, but both Kennan and Charles Bohlen, correctly as it turned out, assured him that Stalin would never accept the American aid. The United States made it clear that participation in what was soon referred to as the Marshall Plan would require inquiries into each recipient nation’s resources, industrial capabilities, gold reserves, and the establishment of stabilized and convertible national currencies.\(^{85}\) Moscow had already rejected the similar conditions required by the IMF or the IBRD, and Kennan and Bohlen were convinced they would do so again. To preempt any accusations that the initiative was somehow a product of American imperialism, a second American requirement – also expected to ensure Soviet rejection of the aid program – demanded that the European nations unite to request aid, ensuring that any agreement would reflect extensive European cooperation toward joint recovery. Americans would enter into no bilateral agreements.

As the Americans expected, these demands caused Stalin to refrain from participating in the aid program. On his order, all Eastern European nations followed suit despite their desperate need for aid. Stalin – even when presented with an olive branch of massive financial aid—did not want to reveal data that would have exposed the Soviet Union’s financial weaknesses and low production levels caused by the extensive war damages. In addition, he was unwilling to liberalize trade practices or monetary policies, as doing so would threaten his grasp on power in the Soviet Union and particularly in

\(^{85}\) Kennan, *Memoirs*, p. 360; Hogan, *The Marshall Plan*, pp. 44-45. Far more erratic and prone to exaggeration than Kennan or Bohlen, Secretary of the Navy Forrestal was certain that “there was no way the Soviet Union would not join.” See *The Forrestal Diaries*, pp. 279, 288.
Eastern Europe. The Soviets, in response, hyperbolically insisted that the ERP was a blatant American attempt to control Europe politically and economically. In this they were wrong, though the program unquestionably connected the U.S. to Western Europe in an unprecedented manner. But if Stalin believed that the ERP threatened to remove the cordon sanitaire they deemed necessary to ensure their security and their ideology, he was right. Western aid and the accompanying demands presented above, would likely have made Communism in Central and Eastern Europe unsustainable.

Cold War historians now unanimously accept that the Marshall Plan was designed to be rejected by Moscow. The revisionist argument that the ERP primarily served to support American capitalism, however, falls short. If so, why was it introduced only in 1947 and not in 1945? Furthermore, if Washington had wanted to control Europe economically and politically, the United States would have insisted on bilateral agreements rather than on a universal agreement with the whole of Europe. Bilateral negotiations would have given the U.S. far greater leverage over individual countries. Instead, the Americans pressed for the establishment of what became the Committee for European Economic Cooperation, which later became the Organization for European Economic Cooperation (OEEC). The predictable outcome was the creation of a strong European political and economic bloc capable of challenging American economic hegemony in the long run. The United States pressed in hopes that the European bloc would thrive as democracies able to combat Communism on their own and because a

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democratic, liberal Europe fit a model Americans had always deemed to be in their interest. The non-Communists European powers did not disappoint; despite the absence of the Soviet Union, they dove into intense collaboration on how best to use American aid to rebuild Europe. In September, the sixteen remaining states outside of the Soviet bloc jointly submitted their request for aid. Over the next half decade, aid worth a total of thirteen billion dollars flowed into Europe from Washington.88

The Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan laid the ground for what was perhaps the greatest ideological American postwar success: the transformation of the European democracies into an American led and organized system. The united, capitalist, democratic Europe of the modern day is often taken for granted to such an extent that scholars overlook the tremendous American achievement that it was to guide these nations through their political and economic transformation. Apart from the highly tense conditions created by Europe’s nineteenth century balance-of-power system, the continent had known no serious collaboration since the creation of the nation state. But, laced with exceptionalist visions for what Americans perceived the world should be, the U.S. commitment to Western Europe revolutionized the continent to such an extent that it was unrecognizable from any other time in history. The real “revolution of the Cold War” was, as Westad correctly argues, “that the United States over a fifty-year period transformed its main capitalist competitors according to its own image.”89

89 Westad, “The New International History of the Cold War,” p. 555. Among the numerous American legacies in Europe is an emphasis on free trade. On this American initiative to transform the European financial trade system, Harold Wilson despairingly wrote to Prime Minister Clement Atlee in August 1947 that because of his “passionate ideological attitude to free trade questions,” the American negotiator Will
In his account of the late 1940s, only published posthumously in 1993, later Director of the CIA, Allen Dulles explained that the Marshall Plan was not an exercise in philanthropy. It was pursued first and foremost because it was believed to be “the only peaceful course now open to us which may answer the communist challenge to our way of life.” Such views demonstrated that both Kennan and Lippmann’s rationale for limited American commitment was not only out of touch with the needs of Western Europe, it was out of touch with the manner in which Americans embraced their global role. Across journals, newspapers, the halls of Congress, and the White House, people spoke of bringing American ideas to the continent of Europe. In an extensive *Saturday Evening Post* article, one columnist expertly explained both the world’s need for American commitment as well as the American responsibility to fulfill it:

“[T]he problem is that the Communists are offering the Europeans an answer to their misery. It may be the wrong answer but many people think it is better than no answer at all. Ideas will have to be fought with ideas. It is hard to convey to Americans that the people of Europe are more starved for ideas than for bread, but it is nevertheless true...[the people of Europe]...are eagerly and desperately waiting for the word from Uncle Sam. Before they go along with the policy of the United States, they want see it implemented with ideas.  

On this issue, few political figures were more outspoken than Senator Henry Cabot Lodge. Even while the Truman Administration tried to publicly emphasize the economic benefits of the ERP in an effort to increase Congressional support, Lodge viewed the policy largely in ideological terms. He took the Senate floor more than three hundred

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Clayton was far too prone to think that because a customs union has succeeded in the US...it would work the same way in Western Europe.” As it turned out, of course, Clayton was right. His efforts helped, as Acheson later wrote, to lay the groundwork for European integration even if Clayton was “nearly a decade ahead of the Treaty of Rome.” Wilson cited in Healey, “Will Clayton.” On Acheson’s views of Clayton, see his *Present at the Creation*, pp. 231-232.  

times throughout the spring of 1948 in defense of the ERP. Defying his own Party leadership, Lodge argued that Americans needed to make democracy an article of export and was convinced that the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan were the vehicles to do so. A World War II veteran, Lodge served in Europe through the end of 1945. The months he spent there impressed upon him the danger of Communist ideas. He saw the Marshall Plan as the remedy for the ills of Communism, but also understood that financial aid was of little value without a strong American ideological commitment to democracy’s defense.

In speeches, articles, town-hall meetings, and on the Senate floor, he worked tirelessly to promote the President’s plan. He recognized that an initiative of this nature would need to be explained to the American people, but he remained confident that the measure would sell itself if the public was properly educated on the impetus behind it. The American people needed to understand the conditions in Europe and the dangers associated with the rise of Communist influence in the region.92 At a town hall meeting in December, Lodge explained to the crowd that anything less than a complete American dedication to Europe could result in a “Marshall Plan in reverse…with the Americans the money-spenders and the Communists the vote-getters.” Europe would unite, he declared a month later, if America took the lead: “We should use our influence to achieve a voluntary integration and unity in Europe in which tariff barriers are removed, financial

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92 Interview with Harold Stein, August 7, 1952. HSTL, Harry B. Price Papers, Box 1.
stability and a solid currency are assured...This is the best hope for avoiding the recurrence of a future European war.”

Similar messages were advanced by a number of private groups with close connections to the American political establishment. The Citizens’ Committee for the Marshall Plan had the backing of men like former Secretaries of War Henry Stimson and Robert Patterson as well as the prominent intellectual, Clark Eichelberger. Another significant contributor was Arthur W. Page, a member of the Council on Foreign Relations and an influential public relations specialist. He believed that the American mission was “to get the Russian out of Western Europe” – which presumably meant Germany, Austria, and perhaps Czechoslovakia and – and ensure that “our ideas will control the world.”

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The boulder that Kennan had loosed from the top of the cliff – in the form of the X-Article – continued its unintended path into 1948 and early 1949 as these American commitments overseas intensified. Not coincidentally, this increased global immersion corresponded with Kennan’s declining influence. The growing gap between Kennan’s view and the nation’s view of America’s global role was made clear with PPS/13, a recommendation Kennan delivered to Marshal in early November. The paper presented a swift overview of American policies around the world and, as Kennan has done in the past, urged cautious maneuvering on America’s part. Accordingly, he recommended that

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countering the Soviets should only be done in areas of America’s choosing and interest. PPS/13 was bereft of any of the ideological views that had come to characterize the many public and official expressions of American foreign policy. In short, it was entirely out of touch with America’s evolving role in the world.95

Events in Germany provide but one example of this. The American decision to include the Western zones of Germany under the ERP had exacerbated the international climate and drawn a furious response from the Soviet Foreign Minister Molotov. Moscow’s criticism was valid in the sense that the major powers had not yet resolved Germany’s future, but the Americans had run out of patience in their wait for such an agreement. Ever since the rejection of the Morgenthau Plan, Americans had – in contrast to Moscow – come to view a healthy Germany as central to Europe’s recovery. The historian Carolyn Eisenberg argues that this realization meant that U.S. officials never did much to work out an agreement with Moscow over Germany’s future, but in truth there is little evidence that an accord with Stalin was ever possible.96 After all, it was Soviet hostility and delay that had inspired Clay’s pressure for greater zonal integration which, as highlighted in chapter four, Moscow had rejected as early as 1946. The Soviet Union wanted an agreement over Germany only if they could control the shape it took. In late 1947, the Western powers took the initiative and, with the acknowledgement that the Cold War was now underway, abandoned the primary principle of Allied cooperation on Germany: the idea that the defeated power should be treated as a single unit. In a move

that would draw the beginning of the demarcation lines between east and west, the U.S. and Great Britain also began preparing for the eventuality of a divided Germany and for the establishment of a West German democratic state. These preparations included currency reforms in the western zones that were intended to stabilize the economy, instill confidence in the currency, ignite production, and curtail black market trade.97

Stalin viewed these developments with grave concern, fearing that the new western currency would flow into the Communist zone through Berlin and compromise his control of the east. In an attempt to force the Western powers to either reconsider their plans for a capitalist, independent Germany in the west or, at the very least, abandon control of their zones in Berlin, Stalin chose to assert his authority the one area where he had maximum leverage. In the summer of 1948 Stalin blockaded Berlin, leaving the citizens of West Berlin trapped and with no supplies. The move was a catastrophic miscalculation on Stalin’s part. The story of Truman’s eleven-month American airlift of goods to the isolated citizens of West Berlin does not need to be retold here.98 What is worth pointing out, however, is that the Berlin incident drew the Americans significantly closer to Western Europe and in the process established a commitment that Washington, regardless of the potential consequences, refused to abandon for the next forty years. In the same way Greece had the year before, Berlin came to symbolize Americans’ view of a world divided between the free and the enslavers. Winston Churchill felt the same. “There can be no doubt,” the former Prime Minister asserted, “that the Communist

97 On this, see McAllister, No Exit, pp. 108-115.
98 For a recent example, see Daniel F. Harrington, Berlin on the Brink: The Blockade, the Airlift, and the Early Cold War (University Press of Kentucky, 2012). Also Feis, From Trust to Terror, pp. 327-383.
government of Russia has made up its mind to drive us…and other allies out…and turn the Russian zone in Germany into one of the satellite states under the role of totalitarian terrorism.”

He wanted the western powers to stand firm on Germany, and the Truman administration willingly obliged.

Kennan was of a different opinion. In November 1948, he submitted to Marshall a carefully attuned suggestion for a more conciliatory policy, advising the administration to seek a broad settlement on Germany. Based on what he deemed to be the national interest, Kennan’s policy proposal balanced risk and reward and carefully sought to avoid what his fellow realist, Hans Morgenthau, later scornfully referred to as the “the pitfalls” of “sentimental philosophy” that both men believed characterized much of the Truman administration’s policy. Like Lippmann had argued the previous year, Kennan viewed mutual withdrawal and the subsequent neutralization of Germany as a productive path forward. The proposal, which was entirely out of tune with the course of U.S. foreign policy and with the President’s view of America’s national interest, was dismissed outright by John D. Hickerson, the Director of the State Department’s Office of European Affairs, as well as by Clay and Charles Bohlen.

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100 This was a conversion from his position in 1946 and 1947 when Kennan had deemed collaboration with the Soviet Union over Germany impossible. For more on this change in Kennan’s views, see Anders Stephanson, Kennan and the Art of Foreign Policy (Harvard University Press, 1992), pp. 130-145. Hans J. Morgenthau, In Defense of the National Interest: A Critical Examination of American Foreign Policy (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1951), pp. 120-121.

101 Kennan’s argument for the unification of Germany and the withdrawal of military forces can be found in PPS 37/1, “A Program for Germany (Program A), November 12, 1948,” FRUS 1948, vol. II, pp. 1325-1338. For Kennan’s view, see his Memoirs pp. 423-426. For an excellent coverage of this situation, see Mayers, George Kennan and the Dilemmas of U.S. Foreign Policy pp. 146-149. The event signaled the beginning of Kennan’s waning influence, something that would soon be sped up by the 1947 National
The widespread rejection of Kennan’s recommendations for Germany reflected Americans’ growing concern over Soviet actions in Europe. In February, almost five months before the Berlin blockade, Soviet-dominated Communists took political control of Czechoslovakia. Kennan had been expecting this development for months. He considered it a defensive “response to the success of the Marshall Plan.” His realpolitik led him to consider it an acceptable defeat since it was not, in his mind, the beginning of a Soviet assault on Western Europe. Americans in general, it turned out, did not concur with that assessment. Soviet actions in Europe exposed democracy’s frailty, leading many to argue for a firmer American commitment. The Saturday Evening Post, for example, thundered that the Communist empire was on the move while America was hesitant. “The longer we are taking making up our minds, the more powerful the Communist appeal in Europe.” A month later, an editorial in the same magazine asserted that as “more lights go out in Europe, it is time Americans began asking themselves how much this country [the United States] has been softened up for a future communist coup.”

Criticizing Henry Wallace – who was challenging Truman as the progressive candidate in the upcoming presidential election – the editors explained that “humanity is faced with the elemental issue: whether communist tyranny shall submerge the earth or men shall...

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Security Act’s creation of the National Security Council (NSC), the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), and the Department of Defense among others. While the PPS lost influence only gradually, its downfall was likely an inevitable consequence of the increased bureaucracy and the militarization of the Cold War. Anna K. Nelson. “President Truman and the Evolution of the National Security Council,” Journal of American History, vol. 72 (September, 1985), pp. 360-378.

Gaddis, George F. Kennan, pp. 303-304.
win the desperate fight to remain free.” Doing nothing was not an option. Doing nothing smacked of appeasement.

The Prague coup only added to Washington’s ever increasing concern over the expanding Communist influence in France, Italy, Scandinavia, and elsewhere. The Italian situation appeared particularly precarious, because the Communists and socialists had emerged as joint electoral favorites. Somewhat hyperbolically, but well in tune with the American perception of what was at stake in Europe, *Time* magazine compared the significance of the Italian election to that of Paul Revere’s ride. In a manner that would become customary for many Americans during the Cold War, the magazine deluded itself into believing that everything hinged on one particular event. “Failure,” in Rome, by which *Time* meant a victory for the leftist coalition, would bring Europe “to the brink of catastrophe.” The National Security Act’s recent authorization of government funds for covert operations unleashed the newly formed CIA, which in turn heavily funded the eventual conservative victors.

Events in Czechoslovakia also shook public and political confidence across Western Europe. No matter how foreseeable it may have appeared to George Kennan, the collapse of Czechoslovakian democracy and the subsequent murder or suicide of Foreign Minister Jan Masaryk pushed Europeans from mere unease to outright fright. On March

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103 “Stalin is Marching While We Drag Our Feet,” *The Saturday Evening Post*, March 20, 1948; “Is America Immune to the Communist Plague?,” *The Saturday Evening Post*, April 24, 1948.
17, 1948, Britain, France, and the Benelux countries concluded the Brussels Pact to form the Western Union, which pledged each member to defend each other from external military action. Even united, the democracies’ depleted militaries still stood little chance of holding the line in a potential war against the several hundred Soviet divisions that were stretched across Eastern Europe. As early as December 1947, the British Foreign Secretary, Ernest Bevin, had broached the idea of American military support during conversations with Hickerson in London. To the State Department official, Bevin presented an unfinished illustration of circles outlining a hypothetical military relationship. As Hickerson later recalled it, there “was one circle, a tight one. Then they wanted another circle taking in the [eventual] Brussels Pact countries and the U.S. and Canada, not quite as tightly drawn, but still a circle to bring us into a collective defense arrangement.”

Although the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), which emerged out of Bevin’s proposal, would formally be created within the principles of the United Nations, which authorized the establishment of regional defense pacts, it only further underlined that the United States had finally given up on the U.N. as the enforcer of security. This drew opposition from men like Taft who opposed increased commitments overseas. Kennan too was opposed, considering it disproportionate to the Soviet threat in Europe and an unnecessary escalation of tension. As on the issue of Germany, he believed the American policy was too inflexible. But he, along with Taft, was in the minority. A military alliance was needed, John Hickerson asserted, regardless of “whether entangling

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105 Oral Interview with John D. Hickerson. HSTL, Oral History Collection.
alliances have been considered worse than original sin since George Washington’s time.”

Dean Acheson, who in January 1949 would replace George Marshall as Secretary of State, shared Hickerson’s view. The opinion of these two men reflected, as Beisner explains, the intensifying position within the United States that it was no longer enough for the west to be “strong enough to contain [italics in original] the Kremlin.” Americans wanted the west to win the Cold War.106 This position left Kennan increasingly out in the cold. He and contemporary realists never fully valued that the American response to the European cries for help – what Geir Lundestad has called “invitations” – was not merely an effort to save the Europeans. It was a series of “conscious and comprehensive attempts at changing Europe (and Japan [see chapter six]) in the direction of U.S. ideas and models.”107

Under the ominous cloud of events in Berlin, Czechoslovakia, and Italy the already limited congressional opposition to the Marshall Plan dissipated by the time it finally came to a vote in the spring. Even Robert Taft reluctantly voted for the measure, though he dismissed any notion that the measure represented a U.S. commitment to the Western European states: “If I vote for the bill,” he insisted, “it will be with the understanding that there is no...obligation, that there is no contract with recipient countries, that they are not our partners.” Whether he truly believed this outcome was possible or simply wanted to avoid the reality of the situation is unclear. Regardless, the Economic Aid Act of 1948, as the Marshall Plan was formally called, passed with only

17 opposing votes in the Senate and a mere 74 in the House. Whatever men like Taft and Kennan – who otherwise had little in common – hoped for, American commitments were expanding not contracting.\textsuperscript{108}

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No sooner had the ink dried on the ERP legislation than Senator Henry Cabot Lodge launched a similar campaign on behalf of NATO legislation. In his mind it was all connected: ideological commitments, financial aid, and military commitment. Europeans needed to believe in the U.S. commitment. He asserted that the “the Christian concept of the dignity of man is the strongest revolutionary force in the world. But because we lack imagination and understanding, we have allowed the materialistic and brutal verbiage of Communism to gain a greater export currency than our own belief which springs from eternal sources.” He concluded that the “fight is fundamentally one for men’s minds. The effort must, therefore, be made by ideas which appeal to the aspirations of men’s souls.”\textsuperscript{109}

Lodge was one of many who now brought religion into the fight. In August of the previous year, in correspondence with Pope Pius XII, President Truman had gone so far as to enlist the Holy See in freedom’s fight. He believed the relationship between the American Government, the American people, and the Pope had the potential to contribute “profoundly” to the creation of a “moral world order,” and he was certain “that those who do not recognize their responsibility to Almighty God cannot meet their full duty toward

fellow men."110 Harry Truman was a Baptist, but he did not consider the Cold War to be a conflict between Christianity and Communism. Neither, indications are, did most Americans, although many regarded it as a deeply spiritual affair. Truman did, however, view Christianity as the foundation of the American way of life. It supported free enterprise, free will, republican government, and individual rights. “Religious morality stood at the center of his world view…for without faith morals could not exist, and without morality there could be no peace,” Andrew Preston accurately asserts. As Truman wrote to the influential religious leader Jesse Bader, the “alternative” to the “annihilation of civilization” was religion. “Religion alone has the answer to humanity’s twentieth century cry of despair.”111 This invocation of faith served, at times, as a Cold War tactic, but as Stephen Whitfield and David Foglesong have shown, it would be misleading to imply that faith did not influence the American Cold War mindset. In his work on the American mission to bring liberty to Russia, Foglesong emphasizes that during the beginning of the Cold War “the invocation of religious themes reflected deeply felt convictions [among people] raised during the ‘Third Great Awakening’ of 1890-1920, when Americans had set out to evangelize the world.”112

As 1948 drew to a close, fear, emotions, instinct, determination, and faith merged with Americans’ longstanding ideological beliefs of an exceptional nation. In November,

110 “Harry S. Truman to His Holiness, Pope Pius XII, August 7, 1947.” The Pope responded favorably to Truman’s overtures. See “Pope Pius XII to Harry S. Truman, August 26, 1947.” HSTL, Myron C. Taylor Papers, Box 1.
Truman won a tight election against the former Republican Governor of New York, Thomas Dewey. The election was fought largely on domestic issues, as neither Dewey nor Strom Thurmond, who represented the States’ Rights Party, presented much criticism of the President’s Cold War foreign policies. The only serious challenge to Truman’s foreign policy came from Henry Wallace’s Progressive Party. Wallace had gained popularity in 1947, but his campaign lost momentum amidst his support for greater cooperation with the Soviet Union, his criticism of the Truman Doctrine, and the formal endorsement granted to his campaign by the American Communist Party. The American people believed the time for partnership with Moscow was over. The National Security Council did as well. In late November, the NSC informed Truman that Soviet ideological “behavior clearly demonstrates that the ultimate objective of the USSR is the domination of the world.” Therefore, the primary U.S. objective, according to the NSC, was now “to reduce the power and influence of the USSR to limits which no longer constitute a threat to the peace, national independence and stability to the world family of nations.”

Harry Truman concurred with the NSC’s call for mission. On January 20, 1949 he addressed the American people for the first time as President in his own right. On Acheson’s recommendation, Clark Clifford had excised the most divisive ideological language from the speech, but it was still plenty powerful in its final form. Truman left no doubt as to what was at stake in the world or how the United States interpreted the

113 Holm, “Also Present at the Creation,” p. 213, n. 20. For an excellent recent account of the election, see Pietrusza, 1948.
115 “Dean Acheson to Clark Clifford, January 17, 1949.” HSTL, Clark Clifford Papers, Box 39.
struggle ahead. It is telling that his inaugural address was entirely about foreign policy. “The American people,” he explained, “stand firm in the faith which has inspired this Nation from the beginning…We believe that all men have a right to freedom of thought and expression…that all men are equal because they are created in the image of God.” Declaring it an American purpose to make their dream of freedom the world’s dream, Truman warned that free nations found “themselves directly opposed by a regime with contrary aims and a totally different concept of life...[and] a false philosophy…That philosophy is communism.” In the two preceding years, the Soviet Union had challenged the American designed world order. But Truman did not despair. He claimed that the Soviet challenge had only made Americans stronger in its test of their “courage…devotion to duty, and [their] concept of liberty.” The American commitment to its role as the leader of the free world, he declared, was now absolute.¹¹⁶ The extent of that commitment was soon to be tested, as the Cold War expanded from Europe to the globe.

6. America in the World: From Point Four to the Korean War

Harry S Truman began 1949 in a buoyant mood. Collectively, the Truman Doctrine, the Marshall Plan, and the impending establishment of NATO appeared to have stabilized the European situation. Even the Western European Communist parties that had seemed to be credible ballot-box contenders during the early postwar years now largely appeared to be on the defensive. Domestically, Truman felt confident as well. He treated his surprising victory over Thomas Dewey as a mandate to fulfill what Franklin Roosevelt’s programs had begun at home and abroad. On January 5, reporting on the state of the Union, the President presented an ambitious agenda to the American people. In casting their vote for him, the voters had confirmed his belief that

poverty is just as wasteful and just as unnecessary as preventable disease. We have pledged our common resources to help one another in the hazards and struggles of individual life. We believe that no unfair prejudice or artificial distinction should bar any citizen of the United States of America from an education, or from good health, or from a job that he is capable of performing...We must spare no effort to raise the general level of health in this country. In a nation as rich as ours, it is a shocking fact that tens of millions lack adequate medical care. We are short of doctors, hospitals, nurses. We must remedy these shortages.

Historians often think of the Fair Deal, as Truman’s economic reform program became known, exclusively in terms of domestic policy. The policy’s underlying belief, however, mirrored ideas that extended well beyond America’s borders. Echoing his faith in Roosevelt’s New Deal for the world, Truman insisted that “the driving force behind our progress is our faith in our democratic institutions. That faith is embodied in the promise of equal rights and equal opportunities which the founders of our Republic proclaimed to their countrymen and to the whole world.” He was “confident that the Divine Power
which has guided us to this time of fateful responsibility and glorious opportunity will not desert us now.”¹

It was exactly this kind of language and commitment that worried George Kennan. “[T]he shadows which fall on all of us, these days, are so huge and dark, and so unmistakable in portent, that they clearly dwarf all that happens among us individually,” he wrote in a long letter to Dean Acheson on the state of American foreign policy shortly before Truman’s speech. Contemplating his own future, Kennan explained to the incoming Secretary of State that if he was to continue in government service, he needed assurances that Americans were not “just bravely paddling the antiquated raft of U.S. foreign policy upstream, at a speed of three miles an hour, against a current which is making four.” Though melancholy was not an unusual state of mind for George Kennan, America’s role in the world worried the Director of the Policy Planning Staff. In the second Truman Administration, Kennan wanted “a new modesty, a new humility, in the conduct of foreign policy, - a modesty which eschews both the arrogance of trying to ‘go it alone’ and the neurotic satisfaction of striking idealistic attitudes.” There was no room, he insisted, “for self-delusion and for lofty pronouncements about peace and democracy.”²

Kennan continued to define Moscow as just another great power that should be assessed and dealt with based solely on its political, economic, and military policies;

² George Kennan to Dean Acheson, January 3, 1949. HSTL, Dean Acheson Papers, Box 65. As he wrote the letter, Kennan did not yet know that Acheson would be appointed to replace George Marshall as Secretary of State. In handwriting at the bottom of page nine of his characteristically long letter, Kennan wrote, “Dear Dean, please note the date on this. It was not occasioned by today’s announcement. Congratulations, GFK.”
concerns of morality ought not to guide or define Washington’s approach to the Soviet Union. Though he certainly must have recognized that the currents were against him, Kennan’s hope of American humility in world affairs illustrated just how much he continued to underestimate the depth of the motivations that had inspired the Truman Doctrine and the emotions its visions had stirred among Americans. Far more than a mere policy, the President’s declaration had reflected an American state of mind. This was never reversible in the manner Kennan now suggested. Contrary to his hopes, the United States continued to form new commitments around the world and began to strengthen those that had already been established. The fear that Communism threatened the American way of life at home and abroad – along with Americans’ strong sense of mission – created a perception of the country’s role in the world that left little space, geographical or psychological, for the balance of power approach to the Cold War that Kennan and other Cold War realists favored.

Historical and cultural consciousness led Americans to think of international affairs in terms of moral universals and global commitments. In a manner that was never replicated by the United States’ democratic allies in Europe, Americans adopted the mentality that democracy’s survival in the world was their responsibility. The most powerful demonstration of this belief came in the National Security Council’s assessment of the international situation following the loss of America’s atomic monopoly and the Communist victory in the Chinese Civil War. A normal power would likely have reacted to these shifts in the international balance of power with some degree of acknowledgement and accommodation. Ideological propensities, however, did not allow
for such a balanced recalibration of U.S. global views. In a language that encapsulated not only America’s Cold War, but many of the nation’s former and future conflicts as well, the top secret NSC-68 report saw two faiths at war for the future of mankind. It described a Soviet “design” on the world against an American “purpose.” The document epitomized American exceptionalist ideology. It spoke of a historical mission to save mankind from the slavery of tyrants who threatened to destroy the American mission. By June 1950, global events seemed to prove all of these prophecies correct as the Cold War turned hot in the Far East.

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Although the Soviet Union’s acquisition of the atomic bomb, the declaration of the People’s Republic of China, and the outbreak of the Korean War had not yet come to pass when Truman was sworn in as President for the second time on January 20, 1949, his inaugural address nevertheless emphasized the tension of the Cold War. In a speech devoted entirely to foreign policy, Truman denounced the “the false philosophy” of Communism. Its global threat, he insisted, made the United States’ democratic mission more necessary than ever. He was adamant, however, that the strength of America rested not solely in its democratic roots or in its military power but also in its humanitarianism, philanthropic traditions, and support for human rights. According to Truman, the Cold War could still be won without firing a shot.

As if to underline that he was the true heir of Franklin Roosevelt, Truman outlined a decisive American global mission. “The old imperialism-exploitation for foreign profit,” the President explained, “has no place in our plans. What we envisage is a
program of development based on the concepts of democratic fair-dealing…Democracy alone can supply the vitalizing force to stir the peoples of the world into triumphant action, not only against their human oppressors, but also against their ancient enemies—hunger, misery, and despair.” Truman held that it was the United States’ responsibility to reverse a global situation where more than half the people of the world were victims of disease, lived with inadequate food supplies, and were faced with “primitive and stagnant” economies. “For the first time in history,” he insisted,

humanity possess the knowledge and skills to relieve the suffering of these people. The United States is pre-eminent among nations in the development of industrial and scientific techniques. The material resources which we can afford to use for assistance of other peoples are limited. But our imponderable resources in technical knowledge are constantly growing and are inexhaustible. I believe that we should make available to peace-loving peoples the benefits of our store of technical knowledge in order to help them realize their aspirations for a better life. And, in cooperation with other nations, we should foster capital investment in areas needing development. Our aim should be to help the free peoples of the world, through their own efforts, to produce more food, more clothing, more materials for housing, and more mechanical power to lighten their burdens.3

In effect, Truman advocated attaching a modernization program to the Doctrine that bore his name. Calling for the United Nations to participate in the Point Four program, as it soon became known, the President insisted that this “must be a worldwide effort for the achievement of peace, plenty, and freedom.” The leadership Truman assumed for the United States in this program reflected Luce’s vision of the “American Century.” It was a

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3 Harry, S. Truman, Inaugural Address, January 20, 1949, PPP, Harry S. Truman, 1949, pp. 112-116. On the decision to use the inaugural as a platform to address the world, see Margaret Truman, Harry S. Truman (New York: Willow Morrow & Company, 1973), pp. 400-402. Also, Oral Interview with Clark M. Clifford. HSTL, Oral History Collection.
“Fair Deal for the World.”⁴ As had Luce, the President declared it America’s responsibility to be more than the arsenal of democracy; Americans needed to be the good Samaritans of the world.⁵ Influenced by both FDR and former First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, who only the previous month had been the driving force behind the establishment of the United Nations’ Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Truman set in motion a program to help lift up those who had not yet reached the same stage of societal, technological, and educational development as Americans.⁶

Prior to 1949, American involvement in international relief work and philanthropy had been limited to temporary aid initiatives, such as the American supply of foodstuffs and other aid during the Russian famine of the early nineteen-twenties and in the aftermath of the Japanese earth quakes during the same decade.⁷ Just as Roosevelt had come to believe by the end of the war, Truman insisted that international circumstances and American missionary responsibilities demanded increased humanitarian efforts on a broader scale; palliative measures were not enough. The original hope had been that the Bretton Woods institutions would take the leading role in such efforts, but, as the Marshall Plan had highlighted, they proved to be incapable of

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⁵ Luce, “The American Century.”
⁶ Harry Truman developed an excellent relationship with Eleanor Roosevelt after FDR’s death. They corresponded regularly and extensively on many international issues, including her role in the development of the United Nations Human Rights Commission. For a collection of their correspondence, see Steve Neal ed. Eleanor and Harry.
rising to the challenge. The State Department and the White House had understood the limitations of the Bretton Woods institutions for some time. In fact, by 1949, ideas for the establishment of more permanent American-sponsored aid programs had been circulated for several years in unfinished form but it was only in the aftermath of the European Recovery Program’s political success, that these ideas were expressed in any formal manner. The most original suggestions came from Walter S. Salant at the Council of Economic Advisers to the Executive Office, and from the State Department’s Benjamin Hardy. Salant was an esteemed economist who had studied under Keynes at Cambridge and had been one of the principal economists involved in assessing U.S. resources, funds, and productive capacity prior to the execution of the Marshall Plan. Hardy was less of an academic, but had gained plenty of hands-on experience while working for Nelson Rockefeller’s Latin America emergency assistance operation during the war. Drawing on his experiences, Hardy advised the Administration that American foreign policy needed to actively promote and export American values of ingenuity, industry, and support; otherwise, he claimed, America would be too easily labeled as nothing more than a negative, anti-communist state.

In late 1948, at the request of the White House’s David Lloyd, Salant and Hardy each submitted memoranda to Lloyd, George Elsey, and Clark Clifford proposing the creation of an American global assistance program. They suggested that, given the

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“almost universal yearning for better conditions of life throughout the world,” the United States should “convert the instrument of America’s immense technological resources…to the rest of the world.” Americans needed to demonstrate how “the application of techniques and procedures that have proved themselves in this country can directly benefit [underdeveloped nations], through increased production of…clothing, housing and other consumer goods, better public health, social conditions, etc.” Their core argument was the need for a new initiative to pick up where the Marshall Plan left off. “ERP is an emergency operation that provides a shot-in-the-arm of immediate consumption of goods and means boosting production in a short time. The new program, expected to operate effectively on less than fifty million dollars annually, would enable the peoples we aid to use their own efforts to continue these short-term benefits indefinitely.” Emphasizing science and technology, they called for making “full and affirmative use of one of the resources in which the U.S. is the richest and the Soviet Union the poorest. Our overwhelming superiority in a field of constructive effort would be apparent to even the most backward and illiterate people.”

Hardy and Salant advocated using the bully pulpit of the inaugural address to present this program to the American people and to the world. “This is the way to make the greatest psychological impact and to ride and direct the universal groundswell of desire for a better world…the details of planning and financing can be developed after the policy is set – a not insuperable task for a nation that leads the world in know-how by an almost incalculable margin.” The proposal expressed the familiar exceptionalist

assumption that others craved the American way of life. In his diary entry the day after Truman’s speech, David Lilienthal cheered the project. As a former director of the TVA, Lilienthal was one of the most experienced thinkers on aid policy and the practical execution of aid programs. He concurred with the President’s assessment that there was an urgent need to pursue “great development undertakings throughout the world, based upon a sharing of our technical skills and resources.” Lilienthal considered it “an effective (italics in original) alternative to Communism.

As in the case of the ERP, Point Four’s purpose was not mere benevolence. The use of “financial assistance,” Lloyd later explained, was “closely linked to the achievement of…political and security objectives.” Foreign assistance was vital to the creation of new consumers of American goods. At the same time, he believed, economic aid programs could serve to contain Communism because they could make the reestablishment of “normal economic trading relationships between” America’s current and potential allies and “areas under Soviet domination” unnecessary. In the absence of increased aid, Lloyd believed, that “the Soviet bloc” would be able to “bring concerted economic pressure upon, [and] their trading position with the Soviet bloc would become dangerously weak unless they could look to some alternative source of supply and financing.”

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12 Lilienthal, Journals vol. II, pp. 448-449.
The national reception of the Point Four program was overwhelmingly positive. There was a surge of excitement among American reporters who felt that the United States was fulfilling its mission. *The New York Post*, in an article pretentiously entitled “Our World,” wrote that just “as the 19th century was Britain’s greatest, so the 20th century is to be America’s greatest…the world will be shaped by the outflow from us…from the now unexplored jungles of Africa to the now unchartered parts of the Far East, from…South America to the vastly productive areas of the Middle East. Europe will become secondary.” Truman’s programs, the columnist concluded were designed “to build, not simply to ‘contain.’” *The Watertown Daily Times* declared that Truman had charted “the new world role of the United States,” asking American capital “to invade new areas…[to] raise the living standards of millions and provide rich markets for American products.” Clearly the program was viewed as a mutually beneficial endeavor. “Our President has given his pledge to a troubled world,” the article continued. Only the U.S. could, the paper dramatically concluded, “light a beacon to pierce the darkness…we continue our crusade for peace.” Nothing summed up the national feeling better than the *Washington Post*’s excitement at the project. In a long and carefully argued front page article, the paper highlighted just how “Roosevelt’s dream” had now finally become a

formal “U.S. objective.” Truman, the columnist insisted, “has given the whole concept a push such as it never had before. He has dramatized it to the hundreds of millions, abroad and at home, who read or heard his inaugural address. He has thrown the whole weight of the Presidency into getting the problem of backward areas out of the realm of talk and into the realm of action.”

In a manner similar to that which Lodge and others had called for the year before, Point Four sought to make ideas the core of America’s message overseas. It aspired to secure goodwill abroad while simultaneously transmitting American visions of freedom and free enterprise, alongside skills and support, to the poorest nations on the planet. At the same time, it reflected a belief still prevalent in early 1949 that Americans could contain Communism at a relatively low cost and without undue risk. Point Four reflected, as Scott Lucas argues in a different context, that the Cold War was “a clash of cultures and ideologies,” not simply a contest of national security or economics.

Point Four built on the American experiences gained from running aid programs in Latin America as well as the Tennessee Valley Authority at home. The TVA’s iconic status made it a central example of American exceptionalism and a model for the export of American ingenuity and ideals. It was no surprise that Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., in the same year as Truman’s speech, called for Americans to enlist these achievements in the fight against the Soviet Union. As he grandiloquently insisted, “no other people in the

16 Scott Lucas, *Freedom’s War: The U.S. Crusade Against the Soviet Union, 1945-1956* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1999), p. 2. The American emphasis on ideas was also evident in the pro-democratic and anti-Communist message that Voice of America began streaming to listeners in the Communist nations at the same time. For more on this, see Walter Hixson, *Parting the Curtain: Propaganda, Culture, and the Cold War, 1945-1961* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1997), pp. 29-56.
world approach the American mastery of the new magic of science and technology. Our engineers can transform arid plains, poor poverty-stricken river valleys into wonderlands of vegetation and power.” The TVA, he insisted “is a weapon which, if properly employed” could overcome “all the social ruthlessness of the Communists for the support of the peoples of Asia.” It highlighted what Americans considered a vital difference between U.S. and Soviet development strategies. Unlike the Soviet model, which was always followed by authoritarian control, the U.S. model allowed for the modernization of societies along with the development of popular government. As such, the TVA ideal would strengthen the relationship between the United States and the less industrialized countries, rather than create a relationship between an imperial power and a dependent country. That, at least, was how the White House and many reporters imaged it.\(^\text{17}\)

Congress allocated thirty-five million dollars to support Point Four in 1949 – slightly shy of Salant’s projections for the program – and although this would increase over time, the program never quite lived up to its supporters’ hopes. Unlike the ERP, Point Four never had extensive Congressional support. Seething from November’s unexpected loss, and already critical of Truman’s extensive domestic aid program, the GOP leadership balked at further increases in government spending.\(^\text{18}\) Perhaps a more fundamental reason for the failure of the program was the State Department’s lack of a bureaucracy capable of implementing such a large initiative. Unlike today, the Foreign


\(^{18}\) Ohio Senator Robert Taft considered Truman’s programs simply “creeping socialism” and a threat to liberty. See his remarks in *Congressional Record 81st Congress*, 1950 (Appendix), pp. AA 2530-2532.
Service of the 1940s was neither trained in the execution of programs on this scale nor did it include an agency tasked specifically with international development in the way USAID would be after its creation in 1961. This shifted too much of the burden of planning and organization to the underdeveloped nations. Unlike the European response to Marshall’s proposal in June 1947, these nations possessed neither the basic organizational structures nor the unity to shape an initial response to the program that might have inspired a more determined American effort.

Because of its shortcomings, diplomatic historians have tended to neglect Point Four or treat it with scorn; it is at best a footnote in most scholarship on the early Cold War. This dismissal is unfortunate. The very fact that this fourth point in Truman’s inaugural address followed the United Nations, the Marshall Plan, and NATO as the first three points implies that this was not a slight idea conceived without purpose. When considered on the long axis, Point Four reflected a growing belief that modernization ought to be an active component of American foreign policy strategy. It was, as Ekbladh shows, an extension of the less organized aid programs of the thirties in Asia and Latin America. Point Four’s real significance is not that it never managed to create a fully sustainable recovery program for the underdeveloped world, but that it represented an attempt to encourage world development that for a short period showed great promise and inspired great ideas.19

19 Oral Interview with Stanley Andrews. HSTL, Oral History Collection. Ekbladh’s The Great American Mission is an excellent recent example of the seriousness that the newer generation of diplomatic historians assigns to ideas and to international aid programs. It stands in strong contrast to works by more senior scholars such as Robert Beisner, whose biography of Acheson only provides three scattered references to
The intensification of the Cold War diminished Point Four’s prospects. At no point did a vacuum of calm develop that would allow for the complex planning and fine-tuning of the program. The Cold War was too powerful. In part, American ideology was to blame. Having created the Soviet Union as an existential threat to the American way of life, Americans were too easily distracted by other events, no more so than at home.

Two months after Truman’s inauguration, visitors from across the world gathered in New York City for the Cultural and Scientific Conference for World Peace. Sponsored by the National Council of the Arts, Sciences and Professions operating under the Moscow run front-organization known as the World Peace Council (WPC), it was an exhibition in propaganda. Communists, socialists, and fellow travelers from the U.S., Europe, and the Soviet Union – at least those who were not denied entry visas – used the stage to present their views on a variety of issues. Under the protection that freedom of speech provided, men like Alexander Fadayev, one of the primary Soviet propagandists and writers of his generation, denounced the Western world as an “antidemocratic, reactionary, imperialist camp led by the ruling circles of the United States of America.” He and others, including many American speakers, criticized Truman’s policies as militaristic, claiming that the soon to be formalized North Atlantic Treaty Organization and U.S. atomic energy policy were nothing more than warmongering.20

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The general American reaction to the event was anger and frustration. In its editorial pages, *Life* scorned not just the Communists who came from overseas but also those operating within the United States. In a powerful picture spread, the magazine exposed fifty prominent Americans for the “glamour, prestige” and “respectability” they had provided the meetings through their support. While acknowledging that Norman Mailer, Arthur Miller, Corliss Lamont, and the Congressmen and church leaders in attendance were not necessarily covert operatives for the Kremlin, the magazine left no doubt that they were “dupes” aiding the enemy.\(^{21}\) The House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC) issued a scathing report condemning the meeting. In over sixty pages, it singled out each participant and denounced the entire proceeding as “a supermobilization of the inveterate wheelhorses and supporters of the Communist Party and its auxiliary organizations. It was in a sense a glorified pyramid club, pyramiding into one inflated front the names which had time and again been used by the Communist decoys for the entrapment of innocents.”\(^{22}\) It was an interesting choice of words for a Committee not known for its concern with entrapment, but it captured the national mood well.

The recently established *Commentary* magazine dismissed the event as nothing more than a “propaganda spectacle” with no attempt to instigate “a genuine intellectual


\(^{22}\)Committee on Un-American Activities, U.S. House of Representatives, *Review of the Scientific and Cultural Conference for World Peace*, (Washington, D.C., April, 1949). Corliss Lamont was a lifelong friend of Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr., as well as the son of prominent American banker Thomas Lamont. Corliss Lamont had testified before HUAC as early as 1946 and was a person of great interest to the Committee. Considering his own prominent role as a Senator and later Ambassador to the United Nations, it is remarkable that Lodge escaped attention from HUAC. Despite antithetical views on global events, Lamont and Lodge remained close friends even after Lodge was twice appointed U.S. Ambassador to Saigon.
debate.” The intellectual William Barrett demanded an American alternative. In this “mortal struggle” against international Communism, he called on the writers and intellectuals in the United States to suit up. Intellectuals needed to work harder to reach the public and to explain what was at stake. He viewed the slogan “No Slavery!” as the most suitable counter phrase to the challenge to Communism. It was an apt statement for a nation that historically and culturally tended to define the absence of freedom as bondage. Barrett, alongside intellectuals like the philosopher Sidney Hook and Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., joined the chorus of public figures emphasizing the advancement of “ideas” as a winning Cold War strategy. Explaining what set the free world apart, they argued, was a necessary weapon in the fight against a foe that ruthlessly exposed citizens around the world to propaganda. The New Republic, Time, and the Saturday Evening Post seconded these assessments. The former called for an American alternative to the “Communist International” and declared that the “world’s battle” in which Americans found themselves was ultimately a clash “between two universal faiths.” In this crusade, “commitment” to the cause would determine the winner.

To many of the reporters covering the WPC Conference, it was the number of American participants that caused the greatest surprise, though it hardly should have. By the spring of 1949, the government had effectively exposed a number of Americans inside and outside of government who still maintained, or had maintained in the past, the public and to explain what was at stake. He viewed the slogan “No Slavery!” as the most suitable counter phrase to the challenge to Communism. It was an apt statement for a nation that historically and culturally tended to define the absence of freedom as bondage. Barrett, alongside intellectuals like the philosopher Sidney Hook and Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., joined the chorus of public figures emphasizing the advancement of “ideas” as a winning Cold War strategy. Explaining what set the free world apart, they argued, was a necessary weapon in the fight against a foe that ruthlessly exposed citizens around the world to propaganda. The New Republic, Time, and the Saturday Evening Post seconded these assessments. The former called for an American alternative to the “Communist International” and declared that the “world’s battle” in which Americans found themselves was ultimately a clash “between two universal faiths.” In this crusade, “commitment” to the cause would determine the winner.

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relationships with the Communist Party or with Moscow-backed front organizations. Although reports indicated that members of the Communist Party in the United States had dropped from 80,000 in 1944 to just 23,000 in 1949, the threat appeared more real than ever.²⁵ Eventually, the search and exposure of Soviet collaborators and sympathizers would take on the name McCarthyism, but such efforts began long before McCarthy rose to prominence and continued well after the Senate censured him in 1954. By 1949, conformity with American global ideals or alienation from American society were becoming the only two options. Either one was with the Americans or one was with the Communists. The Conference in New York only confirmed the widely suspected view that Truman’s loyalty programs begun in 1947 were indeed justified. Less than a year before, Elizabeth Bentley, yet another former Soviet informant to come forward, had accused a number of government officials of espionage, including Harry Dexter White. Another, though not singled out by Bentley, Alger Hiss, went on trial for perjury (the statute of limitation for espionage had expired) just weeks after the Conference ended in New York. The Hiss case was among the biggest court spectacles of the Cold War. Hiss’ presence at Yalta alongside Roosevelt and his prominent list of friends, which included Dean Acheson, John Foster Dulles, and Eleanor Roosevelt, provided fodder for conservatives who publicly insisted that the State Department was deliberately aiding and abetting the Communists.²⁶

In this kind of atmosphere, many intellectuals heeded William Barrett’s call and joined the crusade for an American world order. By the end of the year, Conyers Read, President of the American Historical Association, used the AHA’s annual dinner to insist that in this age of transition Americans would “either be ruled by a dictatorship or by a government democratically controlled.” He went on to insist that

The antidote to bad doctrine is better doctrine, not neutralized' intelligence. We must assert our own objectives, define our own ideals, establish our own standards and organize all the forces of our society in support of them. Discipline is the essential prerequisite of every effective army whether it march under the Stars and Stripes or under the Hammer and Sickle. We have to fight an enemy whose value system is deliberately simplified in order to achieve quick decisions. And atomic bombs make quick decisions imperative. The liberal neutral attitude, the approach to social evolution in terms of dispassionate behaviorism will no longer suffice. Dusty answers will not satisfy our demands for positive assurances. Total war, whether it be hot or cold, enlists everyone and calls upon everyone to assume his part. The historian is no freer from this obligation than the physicist.27

HUAC hearings, arrests, and suspicions fed the convictions of people like Conyers Read and William Barrett that the threats from domestic Communists were not merely academic.

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The growing fear of Communism at home appeared all the more pertinent in light of the events occurring far from American shores during the last four months of 1949. On September 3, a U.S. military reconnaissance plane detected an elevated radioactive count over the northern Pacific. In the coming days, other planes recorded similar levels of

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radiation. The conclusion was inescapable: the American atomic monopoly had been broken.²⁸

The Truman Administration’s initial reaction was incredulity. For four years, a debate had raged within the Administration over whether the Soviet Union would get the bomb in the near future. At a Cabinet Meeting in late September 1945, Truman had asked his primary advisors to respond to a memorandum from Henry Stimson which advocated greater international cooperation on atomic weapons.²⁹ Eventually, that memorandum would lead to Byrnes’ meetings with Stalin in December on U.N. collaboration on nuclear weapons and the Acheson-Lilienthal report. Yet, at the time, some Cabinet members strongly opposed such steps, because, according to Costigliola’s recent account, they thought the creation of the atomic bomb a uniquely American achievement. According to Secretary of the Navy Forrestal, the Russians were “oriental in their thinking” and, as such, incapable of replicating the American feat.³⁰ While Americans may have funded the bomb project, Forrestal’s view ignored the contributions by a long list of European scientists to the Manhattan Project. Nevertheless, other Cabinet members, including Attorney General Tom Clark and Secretary of the Treasury Fred

Vinson, the latter a man Truman had great respect for, joined Forrestal in opposing Stimson’s suggestions. Not long after, General Leslie Groves, the former Director of the American bomb project, aligned himself with this view as well. “Never before has anyone mastered such complexities in so short a time and under such pressure,” he insisted. “Maybe I will be accused of overrating American ability but in answer I point to” the atomic bomb “as my justification.” Like Forrestal, Groves was of the view that no one “but the men who built [the bomb] know its complexity and the almost impossible close tolerances required.” No other nation could replicate the achievement.31

In fairness, most members of Truman’s cabinet disagreed with this ode to American exceptionalism. They accepted the view advocated by scientists that there was no permanent American advantage. Nevertheless, no one had expected the Soviet Union to break the monopoly so soon. Only a year prior to “First Lightning,” the codename the Soviets gave their first atomic explosion, the Director of Central Intelligence, Rear Admiral Hillenkoeter, explained to Truman that since the intelligence community’s report on the “Status of the Soviet Atomic Energy Program” had been delivered to the Joint Congressional Atomic Energy Committee in 1947, nothing had given the CIA reason to alter its assessment of Soviet capabilities. By implication, the DCI, significantly enough, made clear that Soviet atomic espionage had either been unsuccessful or was of minor concern. Hillenkoetter explained that while it continued to be impossible to determine the exact status of the Soviet atomic program, “or to determine the date scheduled by the Soviets for the completion of their first atomic bomb,” intelligence

indicated that “the highest Soviet authority was seriously disturbed by the lack of progress.” Based on this intelligence, the CIA concluded “that the earliest date by which it is remotely possible that the USSR may have completed its first atomic bomb is mid-1950.” The most “probable date,” the CIA believed, was “mid-1953.”

In this context, “First Lightning” shocked the American political and intelligence communities. More significantly, it shocked the American public and the media. “Hiroshima has shaken the whole world,” Stalin had insisted four years earlier. The “balance,” he believed, had “been destroyed.” Now it had been shattered once again. Lilienthal learned the news of the Soviet test while on vacation. “The feeling in the abdomen,” he recalled in his dairy, “here it is [What we’d feared ever] since January 1946…we are here.” Following the advice of Lilienthal, Truman informed the public on September 23 that the White House had evidence “that within recent weeks an atomic explosion occurred in the U.S.S.R.”

In Congress, a melancholy Arthur Vandenberg professed that this “is now a different world.” Americans instantaneously worried about Soviet delivery methods via long range bombers modeled on the American B-29, via rockets delivered from submarines, or via cargo ships docking in American harbors. In truth, the Soviets possessed no real delivery capabilities, but J. Robert Oppenheimer, the nation’s primary

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32 Director of Central Intelligence, Rear Admiral R. H. Hillenkoetter to the President, July 6, 1948. HSTL, Harry S. Truman papers, National Security Council Files, Box 10.
scientist on atomic energy and a consultant to the Truman Administration, calmed few nerves when he explained that the best way to detect a Soviet bomb arriving on a cargo ship was “by screw driver.” Prior to detonation, it was next to impossible to identify an atomic weapon.36 In a panicky letter to Secretary of Defense Louis Johnson, Senator Alexander Wiley (R-WI) insisted that now no place was safe. He called on the Department of Defense to abandon the Pentagon and decentralize and insisted that other major government offices follow suit. Fearing a sneak attack, Wiley insisted that the U.S. “would be a sucker for a solar plexus blow which could knock our country out of an atomic war a few minutes after such a war started.”37

While most members of the House, Senate, and the Truman Administration urged calm, the sense of national panic proved hard to contain.38 An alarmist editorial in Life magazine believed that the Soviet Union, deeply troubled by Truman’s foreign-policy successes in 1948 and committed to “permanent expansion,” refused to accept a “steady contraction of power…To accept it would have been to accept at some point collapse of their regime and death for themselves. They did not accept it. They already had a timetable calling for war…This timetable they now drastically altered: they advanced the calculated date of war.” Life’s description of Soviet ambitions spoke volumes about American views of the Cold War; it was a battle of faith and ideas in which there could be only one victor. To accept the other’s victory would, in the end, mean the destruction

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of one’s own global mission and one’s own faith. “Now the U.S. and the Soviet Union face each other, Bomb to Bomb.” Peace “acceptable to the democratic world must spell defeat and extinction to the men who rule Russia,” the magazine’s editorial board continued.\(^{39}\) The Alsop brothers defined the American reception of the news of the Soviet atomic explosion as “trancelike.” They considered Americans “totally unprepared for the new situation” politically, strategically, and militarily. A “great many people may console themselves,” they concluded, “that perhaps the Kremlin cherishes no aggressive intentions. But really moonstruck powers of self-delusion are needed to believe that if the Soviet Union achieves superior military power this power will not be used for all it is worth. And in this cruel world, the moonstruck rarely survive.”\(^{40}\)

Four days after the President’s announcement, HUAC reopened investigations into atomic espionage and leaks. Before long, critics of the Truman Administration came to view these events as an opportunity to challenge the President and Acheson. Harold Velde (R-IL), later the chairman of HUAC, insisted that the Soviet acquisition of the bomb was “solely because the American Government…had had the official attitude…of being highly tolerant of, and at times even sympathetic to, the views of Communists and fellow travelers.” He had little time for the consistent message from atomic scientists that the creation of an atomic bomb was fundamentally a technological challenge; the bomb’s workings were not a secret that existed on paper and could simply be stolen and

\(^{39}\) “Bomb to Bomb,” *Life Magazine*, October 3, 1949. In the same issue *Life* devoted a series of pictures to the issues. Possibly taken out of context, these pictures, nevertheless show a number of concerned looking U.S. officials, including Secretary of Defense Louis Johnson.

implemented. But in Velde’s opinion – one that became increasingly popular after the later arrests of Klaus Fuchs and Julius and Ethel Rosenberg – espionage had to have been the principal reason for the loss of the American atomic monopoly.

First Lighting increased Americans’ sense that Moscow threatened their role in the world and, by extension, their very existence. “The grim side of the picture,” the Saturday Evening Post argued, “is that the Russian communist dictators are fanatically determined to rule or ruin. They are indifferent to human life, including the lives of their own people, and look upon war as a necessary incident in the achievement of policy.”

In this environment, there was less space for Truman’s Point Four program. As the Daily Boston Globe reported, “fear is a dubious counselor in the shaping of a nation’s foreign policy.” “[H]ysterical expediency,” bred contempt for every “constructive effort” in the aftermath of the Soviet atomic test. Although Point Four was intended to exhibit how humanitarianism and liberal ideas could top Communism, Congress, the editors dourly reported, now met the program “frostily” and with “unconcealed disfavor.”

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If the Soviet atomic test represented the first serious chink in Truman foreign policy armor, a second soon followed. On October 1 Mao Tse-Tung declared the establishment

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43 “With No Atom Monopoly, We’ll Need a New Strategy,” The Saturday Evening Post, October 22, 1949.
of the People’s Republic of China. With this announcement, the most populous country in the world had formally joined the world’s largest in the Communist camp. The Soviet press hailed Mao’s new regime. Isvestia declared the victorious Chinese Communist Revolution one of the year’s two most “stupendous events,” the other being “the world failure of United States calculations upon atomic monopoly.”

The outcome in China was expected. For years, the Truman Administration had attempted to broker a truce between the Chinese Communist Party and Chiang Kai-Shek’s Kuomintang regime in hopes of avoiding a Communist takeover. Frustrated by how cronyism, nepotism, and incompetence enfeebled Chiang’s government and his military, the Americans chose to cut their losses by 1949. That summer, the White House commissioned a State Department White Paper on the situation in China. As Truman explained to John Melby, one of the paper’s principal authors, the purpose was to write “the record and write it straight, no matter who is hurt; tell the truth. That’s the best way to set the American public straight on this thing.” With Mao triumphant, Chiang and his nationalists evacuated to the island of Formosa (Taiwan). Here they received

47 Oral Interview with John S. Service. HSTL, Oral History Collection; Oral Interview with John F. Melby. HSTL, Oral History Collection. Although there was likely little that Truman could have done differently given Chiang Kai-Shek’s obstinacy, the domestic response to the White Paper and to Truman’s China policy in general was largely negative. A campaign to highlight the failings of the Truman Administration was led by Life and Time publisher Henry Luce as well as several conservative Senators and Representatives including Joseph McCarthy and Richard Nixon. The fallout would dramatically erode Truman’s popular support in the coming years.
some economic and political support from Washington but as the State Department White Paper revealed it, Taiwan was a lost cause. In case of war with Mao’s forces, Chiang would receive no aid. As Assistant Secretary of State W.W. Butterworth explained to the British Ambassador, Washington did not deem the nationalist regime “significant enough to make it desirable for the U.S. Government to employ force to prevent the Island from falling under the control of the Communists.”

In general, the Truman Administration’s postwar approach to the Far East lacked the overall coordination that characterized its policy elsewhere. Since the end of the war, only Japan had received a level of attention comparable to that of Europe. As in Germany, the American mission in Japan sought to transform the former enemy into a responsible power at home and eventually abroad. The key components of the occupation policy, from which the Americans deliberately excluded the other Allied powers, were modernization and democratization. Under the command of General Douglas MacArthur, and with administrative support provided by the State Department, the Americans sought to end feudalism, militarism, and discrimination.

48 Memorandum of Conversation between Assistant Secretary of State W. Walter Butterworth and British Ambassador Sir Oliver Franks, December 8, 1949. HSTL, Dean Acheson Papers, Box 66. Despite their willingness to abandon Chiang Kai-Shek, the Truman Administration took a wait-and-see attitude on the recognition of Mao’s Communist China. This hesitation stemmed primarily from the fact that the Chinese Communists appeared to follow Lenin’s example of rejecting any legal international obligations inherited from its predecessor. The outbreak of the Korean War the following year put any talks of recognition on hold for another two and a half decades.

49 For more on Douglas MacArthur’s role in Japan, see Theodore Cohen, *Remaking Japan: The American Occupation as New Deal* (New York: The Free Press, 1987), particularly pp. 3-48; Richard B. Finn, *Winners in Peace: MacArthur, Yoshida, and Postwar Japan* (University of California Press, 1992), particularly 28-65. The decision to pursue the occupation of Japan without the Soviet Union or other Allies rested in part on the fact that Moscow had refused to abrogate its non-aggression pact with Japan until August 1945, but also on an American determination to prevent a divided Japan. As a result, in 1946 MacArthur informed the Allied Council for Japan, which included representatives from the other victorious powers, that their “functions would be merely advisory.” The decision did little to strengthen relations
American role in the world were uprooted, their ideology crushed, and their society recast. As George Atcheson, Jr., a political advisor to MacArthur, explained in a long classified letter to Truman less than six months after the Emperor’s surrender, “the democratization of Japan” was under way and included “mandates for freedom of speech, press, and assembly, abolition of thought control, universal suffrage,” financial, industrial, and agrarian reforms, and “the demilitarization of education.” Americans deemed economic aid and wide-ranging democratic reforms vital, because “if they were not exposed to the American form of progress,” despondent peoples might be “hijacked by false forms of modernity.” In George Atcheson’s view, the Japanese were “groping for a new ideology to replace the shattered one.” He was insistent, however, that with “American efforts, democratic ideas will grow among the people [as] underprivileged people seek to gain for themselves some measure of the individual freedom and dignity which Americans have struggled for and have achieved.” No one seemed to question whether the American development model was transferable to the Far East.

The conditions that secured American control over Japan’s reconstruction were not present in Korea. There, at the end of the war, Americans had to contend with joint


50 George Atcheson, Jr. to President Truman, January 4, 1946. HSTL, Harry S. Truman Papers, President’s Secretary’s Files, Box 159.

51 Atcheson, Jr. to Truman, January 4, 1946. HSTL, Harry S. Truman Papers, President’s Secretary’s Files, Box 159. U.S. policy toward Japan, as defined by the National Security Council, made “economic recovery…the prime objective of United States …It should be sought through a combination of a long-term United States aid program envisaging shipments and/or credits.” It was to “cut away existing obstacles to the revival of Japanese foreign trade [and]…facilitate restoration and development of Japan’s exports.” On this, see “NSC 13: Recommendations with Respect to U.S. Policy Toward Japan, September 29, 1948.” HSTL, Harry S. Truman Papers, NSC Files, Box 178.
Communist occupation of the old Hermit Kingdom. While Soviet officials selected and trained Korean Communists to control the country north of the thirty-eighth parallel, American forces took charge of the country’s southern half. This demarcation was to be temporary; it was a practical measure designed to lead Korea toward independence and unification. The Cold War’s influence after 1947, however, precluded such an outcome. When in November of that year a U.N. resolution called for nation-wide elections to ensure unification, the North refused to partake. Americans moved forward alone, and in the summer of 1948, the United Nations oversaw and approved the election of an assembly and, subsequently, of Syngman Rhee as President of the Republic of Korea. According to the NSC, the goal of American policy was “a united, self-governing, and sovereign Korea…independent of foreign control and eligible for membership in the U.N…. [and] fully representative of the expressed will of the Korean people.” As in Japan, the purpose was “to assist the Korean people in establishing a sound economy and educational system as essential bases of an independent and democratic state.” So as to prevent any charges of American imperialism, the Council specifically called for the withdrawal of all “remaining U.S. occupation forces…as early as practicable” given these objectives for Korea’s future. Despite the fact that Korea was teetering on the brink of

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52 The United Nations Temporary Mission in Korea which oversaw the elections concluded unanimously that the elections in the South “were a valid expression of the free will of the electorate.” For more on this, see The Political Adviser in Korea (Jacobs) to the Secretary of State, June 30, 1948, *FRUS* 1948, vol. VI, pp. 1231-1232. The elections were approved despite widespread violence instigated by Communist groups that left well over one hundred people dead, as well as the decision by some parties to boycott the proceedings. The American media embraced the elections as a victory for the American democratic mission. See, in particular, “South Korea Turns Out 85% Vote Despite Terrorism that Kills 38,” *The New York Times*, May 11, 1948; “Election in South Korea is a Vote Against Russia,” *The New York Times*, May 16, 1948; “Pro-American Parties Win 61 Korea Seats,” *The Washington Post*, May 14, 1948; “Korea’s First Vote,” *Life*, May 24, 1948.
civil war, this withdrawal continued during 1949 and early 1950 as the U.S. continued to demobilize in South Korea while the Red Army also evacuated the North. Americans understood that Syngman Rhee often exercised strongly antidemocratic policies. But to those who criticized the often harsh regime, U.S. Ambassador to Seoul John Muccio explained that since the capital was less than thirty miles “from where its soldiers and police are frequently engaged in armed conflict [and] the Pyongyang radio fills the air with demands for the liquidation of every member of the Government…it has been difficult for me privately to advise the Korean President against certain extreme measures.” Americans worried about Korea’s ability to proceed as a divided nation and had grave concerns about the ability of Korea to democratize without extensive Western supervision. Nonetheless, the hope in Washington was that the U.S. had done its duty in helping to shape the beginning of a democratic nation.

In comparison to Korea and Japan, the U.S. role in South East Asia was limited. Except for a small contingent of OSS officers, Americans played no part in overseeing the Japanese surrender. When the war ended, France returned to its colonies in Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam. As Edgar Snow rightly saw it in 1946, there would be no “four freedoms in Indochina.” In light of Ho Chi Minh’s attempt to establish an independent Vietnamese state in September 1945 and the United States’ later involvement in Vietnam,

53 Ambassador Muccio to Niles Bond (Assistant to the Director of the Office of Northeast Asian Affairs in the State Department, September 12, 1949, quoted in William Stueck, Rethinking the Korean War (Princeton University Press, 2002), p. 195.

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it is tempting to criticize the Truman Administration for having abandoned the principles of anti-imperialism and national self-determination. But the American unwillingness to prevent the French return to Indochina should not be interpreted as approval. Americans did not put the same kind of pressure on France as they did, for example, on the Dutch in Indonesia, because they were convinced of Ho’s Communist leanings and because they did not want to undermine France’s status in Europe. As *Washington Post* reporter Ernest Lindley explained it, however, Americans expected that Indochina would be returned to France with “specific conditions…looking toward independence.”

Like Roosevelt, Truman despised European imperialism. At the same time, he shared his predecessor’s belief that the underdeveloped world required tutelage before independence. It had consistently been American policy that the “sudden withdrawal of imperial authority…would lead either to chaos or to the setting up of local dictatorships.” As in their own previous efforts in the Philippines, American policymakers therefore considered tutors necessary to guide the underdeveloped peoples of Indochina. As explained in chapter three, the United Nations Trustee program that the Roosevelt Administration had pressed so hard for had been designed to ensure that this could be executed without the European powers regaining the kind of control they once possessed and that “less civilized” nations would be led toward independence. Since the trustee program had stalled in the U.N., the French appeared to be the only option. Ho

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55 Edgar Snow, “No Four Freedoms for Indochina,” *The Saturday Evening Post*, February 2, 1946. Snow spent considerable time in Saigon in 1945 and 1946 and provides a powerful first-hand account of French rule. Snow was strongly opposed to any Western imperialism, and as such, is not the most reliable source. His views, however, are backed up by numerous others’ accounts. See, for example, David Marr, *Vietnam 1945: A Quest for Power* (University of California Press, 1995).

had originally asked for U.S. recognition in September 1945, before the French returned to Vietnam but the Truman Administration had proven uninterested. In accordance with the long established view, the Vietnamese were not considered capable of ruling responsibly without Western guidance.

Partly because they knew little of Indochina, and partly because the region in the context of the global postwar chaos was of little importance, Truman and Acheson never appreciated just how irreconcilable the French goals and the Indochinese nationalists’ demands actually were. Americans did pressure Paris to find a solution that would limit French influence and secure nationalist political influence, but otherwise they issued few demands. In May 1947, less than two months after the announcement of the Truman Doctrine, Marshall told Jefferson Caffery, the American Ambassador to Paris, that Washington was increasingly “concerned about the slow progress toward a settlement” on the independence issue. At the same time, the Secretary of State remained apprehensive that following the relaxation of European control, “internal racial, religious, and national differences could plunge new nations into violent discord [and that as a result,] Communists could capture control.” Marshall explained to Caffery that the Administration considered the “best safeguard” against this to be “continued close association between newly-autonomous peoples and powers which have long been responsible for their welfare.” Americans did continue to lean on France even after Paris established the quasi-independent State of Vietnam under the leadership of former Emperor Bảo Đại in March 1949. Relaying their experience from Chiang Kai-Shek’s China, the U.S. Ambassador in June explained to the French Foreign Minister, Robert
Schuman, that France would not be able to provide for the “legitimate aspirations” of the Vietnamese people if “they failed to obtain the support of truly nationalist elements” in Vietnam. Washington wanted independence for Vietnam, but not at the cost of Communism.57

As is evident from this brief overview, U.S. policy in the Far East was unorganized for most of the early postwar period. Although Americans ideologically engaged the Cold War as a universal struggle, the absence of a serious Communist threat in the region resulted in a muddled approach. Only Mao’s rise to power caused a recalibration of U.S. policy in the Far East. Three weeks after the declaration of the People’s Republic of China, the NSC concluded that, for the foreseeable future, “it is the USSR which threatens to dominate Asia through the complementary instruments of Communist conspiracy and diplomatic pressure supported by military strength.” American policy “must be to reduce the power and influence of the USSR in Asia to such a degree that the Soviet Union will no longer be capable of threatening…the peace, national independence or stability of the Asiatic nations.”58 To counter Moscow, the NSC insisted that the U.S. objective for Asia must be “the development of friendly, stable, and self-sustaining states in conformity with the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter.” Because of their individual weakness and their inability to defend themselves in the last war, the NSC believed that the Asian countries would follow the European example and “draw together” to form a united front. It should be U.S. policy to

57 The Ambassador in France (Bruce) to the Secretary of State, June 29, 1949, FRUS, vol., VII, pp. 65-66.
“participate in and guide such an association [of Asian nations] toward harmony with the free world.” Participation, the Council warned, “should be based upon equality and partnership,” not on American overlordship.59

A well-developed aid program might have gone a long way to assist in the creation of such collaboration between the Americans and the nations of the Far East. In a January 1950 address to members of the Americans for Democratic Action in Washington, D.C, Walter Salant called for the “vigorous prosecution of the Point Four Program” in Asia. This, he believed, would allow Americans to pursue a policy in which they sought to align themselves with democratic forces across the underdeveloped world. “Point Four…is an attempt to supplement the necessary but essentially negative policy of mere military containment with a constructive program for remedying the conditions of want and hunger…upon which anti-democratic forces thrive.60

Salant’s speech elucidated how the Truman Administration hoped to navigate a course between positive reforms through Point Four aid and increased security measures through military aid.61 Overall, however, the State Department had a poor sense of how

61 The issue of military aid became urgent when, in February 1950, the People’s Republic of China and the Soviet Union took steps to formally recognize Ho Chi Minh’s government as the legal government of Vietnam. The conclusion drawn in Washington was that the “whole of South East Asia” was “in danger of falling under communist domination.” In response, the United States “extended diplomatic recognition to the French created states of Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia” in February, allowing the U.S. to provide “immediate military assistance” to counter “the communist threat” to these nations. For more on this, see, Memorandum from the Secretary of State to the President, March 9, 1950, FRUS, 1950, vol. VI, pp. 40-44. See also, Memorandum of Conversation, by the Politico-Military Adviser, Bureau of Near Eastern, South Asian, and African Affairs (Robertson), March 14, 1950, FRUS 1950, vol. VI, pp. 55-57. Military Assistance Programs for the Far East and Their Priority in Relation to Other Programs, March 11, 1950, FRUS 1950, vol. VI, pp. 52-53. For the discussions on recognition, of the independent nations of South
to establish an effective counterweight to Communism. They never truly understood that there was little likelihood of a natural partnership among Asian nations and no natural inclination toward democracy. To foster that would have required a far greater meliorist effort. As early as 1946, George Atcheson warned Truman that here, “[L]iberalism is vague and difficult to define.” Communism, in contrast, “is positive and concrete.” Americans hoped that elections in Korea and increased pressure on the French in Indochina would help bring about liberal economic and political reform. They likely should have heeded Walter Lippmann’s warning that the “masses of Asia have known little or nothing of freedom, or of the gospel of the equality of human persons.” He saw little hope that this would change in the immediate future. This left Asia vulnerable to an extent that the Truman Administration appreciated only once war was upon them.

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At “the half mark of the century,” the influential New York Times columnist Arthur Krock insisted, “every government policy, act and thought of Washington is based on” international Communism. He considered it “the most sinister [threat]…of the first half of the twentieth century.” George Kennan’s prophecy that containing Communism would, in time, ensure the ideology’s collapse had by now lost much of its credibility. The dam had been breached, and Communism now challenged Americans not only in Europe but around the world as well. Americans perceived the dual danger now emanating from Moscow and Beijing as a direct threat to the American way of life.

East Asia, see “Memorandum of Conversation, February 3, 1950.” HSTL, Dean Acheson Papers, Box 65. “Meeting, the White House, February 4 1950.” HSTL, Dean Acheson Papers, Box 65.

Washington suffered another setback in mid-February 1950 when Stalin and Mao, side by side, announced the establishment of a formal alliance between the Soviet Union and the People’s Republic of China. With this announcement, Communism appeared monolithic and on the march; it was not suffering from the internal disorder Kennan had predicted. To Americans, this Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Alliance and Mutual Assistance was just “as disturbing as the German-Italian-Japanese” Tripartite Pact of 1940 had been.\(^6^3\) Its goal, Washington believed, was nothing less than world domination.

In early 1950, Truman requested from his national security team an extensive review of U.S. foreign policy.\(^6^4\) This task fell principally to the State Department’s Paul Nitze, who had replaced Kennan as Director of the Policy Planning Staff in January. Kennan and Nitze had originally collaborated closely on the PPS, but their different interpretations of the Cold War had steadily driven a wedge between them throughout 1948 and 1949. Kennan did not believe that Stalin would engage in reckless military action, and, as a result, was adamant that the United States’ primary Cold War weapon should be its economic potential. “Military commitments,” he explained in a 1948 NSC memorandum, should “only” be in cases of “immediate” need.\(^6^5\) In contrast, Nitze viewed Moscow as a force driven by a messianic quest for control of the world. He had “studied, almost memorized, Spengler’s *Decline of the West,*” and he believed that fate literally awaited the American designed world order if the Truman Administration failed to act resolutely. It is an exaggeration to label Nitze a hawk and Kennan a dove, as one

\(^6^3\) Beisner, *Dean Acheson,* p. 275.
\(^6^5\) NSC 20/4, November 23, 1948. HSTL, Harry S. Truman Papers, NSC Files, Box 7.
journalist recently did in an account of the two men, but there is little doubt that Dean Acheson’s selection of Nitze to head the PPS signaled that Kennan’s approach to the Cold War had run its course.66

The reassessment of policy that Truman had requested reached his desk in April. Formally known as National Security Memorandum 68 (NSC-68), it called for a dramatic reversal of postwar defense policy in order to bring America’s military capabilities in line with its commitments around the world. Less than two years earlier, the NSC had confidently concluded that “if Western Europe is to enjoy any feeling of security at the present time, without which there can be no European economic recovery and little hope for a future peaceful and stable world, it is in large degree because the atomic bomb, under American trusteeship, offers the present major counterbalance to the ever-present threat of Soviet military power.” At that point, all military options remained on the table. General Omar Bradley confirmed this in July 1949, when he told the House Foreign Affairs Committee that “the first priority of the joint defense is our ability to deliver the atomic bomb.”67 Although the Soviets for now lacked a delivery system, the psychological impact annulled the American atomic trump. In response, NSC-68

66 Nicholas Thompson, The Hawk and the Dove: Paul Nitze, George Kennan, and the History of the Cold War (New York: Henry Holt, 2009); Beisner, Dean Acheson, pp. 118-120. Acheson did not fire Kennan. He continued to call upon Kennan for advice until he left the State Department the following year. However, as Kennan told the historian Wilson Miscamble much later, Acheson “was likely somewhat relieved that I myself decided to go and that he would be able to work with Mr. Nitze on the question of our military policy.” For more on this, see Miscamble, George F. Kennan, p. 292, n. 17.

67 NSC-30, “United States Policy on Atomic Warfare, September 10, 1948.” HSTL, Harry S. Truman Papers, NSC Files, Box 177. For Bradley’s testimony, see Mutual Defense Assistance Act of 1949: Hearings on H.R. 5748 and H.R. 5895 before the House Foreign Affairs Committee, 81st Congress, Washington, 1949. One example of this use of the atomic capability as a deterrent was the decision by Truman to move B-29s to Great Britain during the Berlin 1948-49 Berlin crisis. The B-29 was the bomber that had carried the atomic bombs to Hiroshima and Nagasaki three years earlier. For more on this, see Daniel F. Harrington, Berlin on the Brink, pp. 119-125.
recommended a “rapid buildup” of both conventional and nuclear forces, increased
psychological warfare and covert operations against the Soviet Union and her satellites,
and accelerated research and development of the hydrogen bomb. In short, NSC-68
sought to ensure superior overall power for the United States. If this objective failed, the
authors warned, the Soviet Union could, by 1954 – the year they referred to as the “year
of maximum danger” – at least reach parity with the U.S. atomic capabilities. At that
point, they argued, Moscow would be tempted to launch an unprovoked strike against the
United States and its allies.

Far more than a mere call for rearmament, NSC-68 was the principal document of
American Cold War ideology. It was a policy recommendation, but it read like a sermon.
In precise, yet hyperbolic, language, the top secret document demonized the Soviet
Union’s “design” on the world order. It portrayed the Kremlin as animated “by a fanatical
faith, antithetical” to Americans’ vision of global democracy. The Communists were
“implacable” in their desire to “destroy” Americans’ “purpose” in the world. NSC-68’s
central message was that the United States must “lead in building a successfully
functioning…free world. It is only by practical affirmation abroad as well as at home, of

68 Discussions over the development of the hydrogen bomb had been underway for some time, particularly
in the aftermath of the Soviet atomic bomb test. The affirmative decision, even if still largely in an
exploratory context, did not come until January and February 1950. Truman was never likely to oppose the
h-bomb project, and may, as Arnold Offner argues, have made an informal decision much sooner. The
President was uncomfortable around content experts and had a poor grasp on technical and strategic issues.
Consequently, the decision to build the bomb was of the black and white type that Truman preferred. It
likely was the right decision, as well, since the Soviets had been working on an h-bomb since 1948. For
more on this, see Offner, Another Such Victory, pp. 358-367; Miscamble, George F. Kennan and the
Making of American Foreign Policy, pp. 298-308; Beisner, Dean Acheson, pp. 223-235; Nitze, From
Hiroshima to Glasnost, pp. 87-92. On the Soviet H-bomb program see, Andrei Sakharov, Memoirs (New
our essential values, that we can preserve our own integrity in which lies the real frustration of the Kremlin design.” Americans, the authors concluded, “must fight if necessary to defend our way of life,” and must seek to create global conditions “under which our free and democratic system can survive and prosper.”

Given the nominal peace that still existed in early 1950, a normal power might have been satisfied with simply frustrating the potential antagonist’s future moves. NSC-68’s emphasis on American “purpose” and Communist “design,” however, indicated that mere containment was no longer enough. The mutually exclusive nature of the two ideologies and the conspiratorial nature of Communism dictated that the Truman Administration pursue the destruction of the enemy. Kennan had implied similarly in his Long Telegram and in his X-article, but never with the sense of urgency Nitze showed. History had taught Americans, the writers of NSC-68 believed, that ideologues and aggressors never negotiated in good faith and only abused “peace” as a tactical opportunity to wage war by other means. To counter this, they insisted that the objective of U.S. policy be the annihilation of the Soviet Union’s “power and influence” in the world and the eventual “decay” of Communism everywhere. Since “preventive’ war – in the sense of a military attack not provoked by a military attack upon us or our allies – was “unacceptable to Americans,” Nitze and his associates called for Americans to “project” their “moral and material strength [and bring about]…a fundamental change in

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the nature of the Soviet Union system.” There could be no negotiations with the Soviet Union. Total Cold War was to be U.S. policy.70

The State Department’s principal experts on the Soviet Union, George Kennan and Charles Bohlen, played no significant part in the NSC-68 process. Of the two, Bohlen was more sympathetic to Nitze’s work, but neither man approved of the document’s tone or message. In their opinion, Moscow was neither fanatical nor inherently militaristic or expansionist. Capabilities, they insisted, did not equal intentions.71 As Bohlen later complained, Nitze’s team appeared to have made no serious effort to analyze “Soviet thought in regard to war between states or the even more elementary fact that any war [would also carry] major risks to the Soviet system in Russia.” The charge was not unfair but Nitze had little time for what John Lewis Gaddis has aptly called Kennan’s “preference for prophecy.” Nitze believed in numbers and data. He would not allow Soviet capabilities to outpace Americans’ on the hunch that Stalin did not intend to go to war.72

In the view of many diplomatic historians, NSC-68’s aggressive language primarily reflected Acheson’s and Nitze’s determination to convince the budget conscious President to accept increased military spending. As evidence of this, most

70 Ibid.
71 For Bohlen’s views, see Nitze, From Glasnost to Hiroshima, pp. 97-98; Bohlen, Witness to History, pp. 290-291.
For Kennan’s thoughts see Kennan to the Secretary of State, February 17, 1950, FRUS 1950, vol I, pp. 160-167. Also see his Memoirs, pp. 90-92, 475, 499; Gaddis, George F. Kennan, pp. 390-392; Miscamble, George F. Kennan and the Making of Foreign Policy, pp. 311-313.
72 For Bohlen’s views, see Charles E. Bohlen (Minister to Paris) to The Director of the Policy Planning Staff, April 5, 1950, FRUS 1950, vol I, pp. 221-225; The Counselor (Bohlen) to the Director of the Policy Planning Staff, July 28, 1951, FRUS 1951, vol. I, pp. 106-109; Charles E. Bohlen, Memorandum, August 22, 1951, Ibid. pp. 163-166. For Nitze’s view of Kennan and of the Soviet Union, see Oral History Interview with Paul Nitze. HSTL, Oral History Collection. Gaddis, George F. Kennan, p. 390.
present Acheson’s comment that the proposal was intended first “to bludgeon the mass mind of ‘top government,’” and then the public, into accepting the necessity of strengthening the U.S. military.73 Truman certainly was, as Arnold Offner expertly shows in his biography of the President, in many respects a simple man. He often brought a one-dimensional approach to government affairs. In order to explain the quadrupling of defense spending that Nitze estimated necessary to implement NSC-68, “bludgeoning” the President may indeed have been a useful tactic.74

Some scholars simply view this rearmament as central to the establishment of an American empire overseas and to the protection of American capitalist interests abroad. More recently, in what can best be described as a spin-off of early Cold War revisionism, Curt Cardwell insisted that NSC-68 and U.S. Cold War policy in general were exclusively intended to protect U.S. economic interests. National security concerns, he argues, were mirages created by U.S. officials to scare the Congress and the American people into supporting policies of economic expansion. NSC-68’s hyperbolic language reflected American concerns over their prospective allies’ balance-of-payment problems rather than the threat of the Soviet Union as an ideological power. While few scholars subscribe to Cardwell’s radical thesis that the Truman Administration did not fear the expansion of Communism in the world or his view that their policies were exclusively designed to protect the U.S. economy by bridging the “dollar gap” in Europe after the


74 Oral Interview Paul Nitze. HSTL, Oral History collection.
Marshall Plan expired, the revisionist insistence that NSC-68 was part of a project to extend American influence in Europe, Asia, and the Western Hemisphere and to secure for the United States large degrees of control over international trade and finance has merit.\(^\text{75}\) The American ideological vision for the world had always held, after all, that these geographical areas would be better off under heavy U.S. influence. In that sense, rearmament and a strengthened economy were central to NSC-68’s recommendations and its ultimate goal of a strengthened American position in the world.

Diplomatic historians should be careful, however, not simply to interpret the document’s language as a mere means to an end. NSC-68 was more than a sales pitch to convince the economizers. The document’s rhetorical heritage reflected a reality that went well beyond matters of national economic interests and security; it reflected a reality closely tied to American culture, beliefs, traditions, language, and heritage. NSC-68’s insistence that the United States must “fight if necessary to defend our way of life” and “foster a world environment in which the American system can survive and flourish” was strikingly similar to the logic of previous generations during the Revolutionary War, the Civil War, and the two World Wars. It defined the United States as the representative and protector of an ideal society and contrasted it with the Communist “other.” This emphasis on good and evil, on freedom and enslavement, and on purpose and design reflected how Americans had interpreted their global mission over time. Its Manichean logic reflected the kind of open-ended universal responsibility that is part of America’s

\(^{75}\) Curt Cardwell, *NSC 68 and the Political Economy of the Early Cold War.* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011). Cardwell insists that the U.S. did not believe Moscow wanted a war and that the only plausible explanation for NSC 68 is that the U.S. wanted to use the specter of Communism to continue the outflow of American dollars once the Marshall Plan expired.
identity. Similarly, NSC-68’s themes of rehabilitation and conversion of the “other” have a substantial lineage. Etymologically, they appear in Winthrop’s Model of Christian Charity, in Abraham Lincoln’s second inaugural address, in Woodrow Wilson’s many denunciations of Imperial Germany, in Henry Stimson’s WW II dismissal of a world divided between freedom and slavery, in FDR’s speeches and fireside chats, and even in Kennan’s X-article. They are traceable through the modern era as well, most evidently in the language employed by the Kennedy and Reagan Administrations but also in the more recent global war on terror. Given this genealogy, NSC-68’s language cannot easily be dismissed as mere oratory. The central theme was not the defense of democracy at home, but the continuation of America’s crusade for freedom everywhere. Nitze summed up the mission well when, reminiscing about his time in government service, he explained that his happiest and most productive years were “when I was working closely with Dean creating a modern world (my italics).”

Acheson understood that creating this modern world required both the President’s and the public’s support. Truman was budget conscious and, given his ambitious domestic program – already facing opposition from Republicans in Congress – he opposed excessive deficit spending. The public too required guidance, Acheson believed. It is significant, however, that the campaign Acheson began in the spring of 1950 was not intended to manipulate the American public. As in the case of the Truman Doctrine, private and classified memoranda make clear that U.S. officials believed in the

\[\text{Nitze quoted in Beisner, } \textit{Dean Acheson}, \text{ p. 120.}\]
\[\text{For more on Truman’s hopes to contain the defense budget, see “Truman’s Annual Message to the Congress, the President’s Economic Report, January 6, 1950,” } \textit{PPP, Harry S. Truman, 1950}, \text{ pp. 18-32.}\]
message they took to the American people. They acknowledged, as one NSC-68 advisor put it, that the people needed to be informed “with no sugarcoating.” Democracy made blunt honesty necessary, as NSC-68 implied, but it also made exaggeration inevitable. Charles Beard was right, after all, when he claimed that the American system demands hyperbole. Nevertheless, even if the chosen language in speeches and other public pronouncements served propagandistically, this does not rule out that this language also served as a component in the actual determination of policy and public beliefs.

As Acheson explained it to Congressman Christian Herter (R-MA), the nature of American democracy gave the people “a false sense of security.” The public underestimated, the Secretary believed, that the Cold War was “a real war and that…the Soviets are intent on world domination.” It was necessary to make the people understand that the United States was “the only real force in opposition to their movement.” His main concern was that this false sense of security might lead Americans to underestimate the urgency of the situation. The policy elite worried that the popular mood was prone to unpredictable oscillations, something that its shifting positions in both world wars seemed to prove. What was needed, Acheson explained, was an “education in the

80 The concern about the public’s vacillating attitude to foreign policy issues and the need to explain the international situation in plain terms was the object of a number of scholarly works during this period. See, for example, Gabriel A. Almond, The American People and Foreign Policy (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1950), p. 86; Martin Kriesberg, “Public Opinion: Dark Areas of Ignorance,” in Public Opinion and Foreign Policy, Lester Markel ed. (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1949), pp. 49–64.
obvious.” That education meant bringing the ideology of NSC-68 to the American public in order to remind them of what was at stake.

An excellent example of this came at the University of California, Berkeley, where Acheson was scheduled to deliver a major policy address in March. Chatting with reporters in advance of the speech, the Secretary of State defined the Cold War as an “irreconcilable moral conflict.” The United States was not searching for war, but Moscow, in Acheson’s view, was attempting to “deny us the physical environment in which to develop our way of life.” The speech Acheson delivered the next day reflected this view, along with the arrogant attitude that Kennan had warned Acheson of in his January letter cited above. More so, it reflected the barometer of righteousness that Americans used to distinguish Washington’s purpose from the Kremlin’s designs. Addressing the student crowd, Acheson explained that there could be “no moral compromise with the contrary theses of international communism.” He affirmed that the Cold War could come to an end, but only if the Soviets would support the unification and democratization of Germany and Korea, end their excessive veto use in the United Nations Security Council, collaborate on nuclear arms control, suspend their hostile anti-Western propaganda, and withdraw their troops from their European satellites. In effect,

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81 Beisner, _Dean Acheson_, p. 244. When confronted decades later with the accusation that the Administration exaggerated the threat of Communism, Clark Clifford responded that “There's an expression that's used a great deal now; the first syllable of the word starts with the word “bull.” Now, I won't use the expression because I do not think it's refined, but this would be an almost perfect time for the use of that particular word in describing that attitude toward what went on… I would say to you: There is no truth whatsoever. There is no semblance of truth; there is no iota of truth in that.” Clifford may not have been the most credible witness on this but on the other hand, he had little reason to be dishonest at this stage. For more see Oral Interview with Clark Clifford, HSTL. Oral History Collection.

82 Secretary Acheson’s Background Press Conference, March 13, 1950. HSTL, Dean Acheson Papers, Box 68.
Acheson’s message to Moscow was simple: the United States would be happy to negotiate with the Soviets, as soon as they ceased being Communists.83

Acheson’s public campaign – referred to by him as an effort in “total diplomacy,” may, in part, have been intended to serve as a counterweight to Senator Joseph McCarthy’s increasingly aggressive charges against the State Department begun a month before. The Secretary’s message was consistent enough in the years before and since, however, that McCarthyism hardly suffices as an explanation.84 The American people, in any case, firmly endorsed the Administration’s position. To the Washington Post, the speech summed up the public’s view of the Cold War. “[T]heir unanimity [of support] furnishes a strength to this Nation’s diplomacy such as no other Foreign Minister in the world possesses.”85 National opinion polls going back well over a year revealed that the public did indeed share the Truman Administration’s concerns. In July of 1949, two months before the Soviet atomic bomb test, Gallup polls showed that seventy-three percent of Americans disapproved of Communists teaching in U.S. schools and colleges. The overwhelming majority of both Republicans and Democrats believed that the American Communist Party should be outlawed. The American people showed a similar apprehension regarding Soviet foreign policy. When asked in November 1949 to evaluate


84 In February 1950, McCarthy theatrically alleged that hundreds of State Department employees – known to Acheson – were Communists or sympathized with the Communists. Coming only three weeks after Alger Hiss’ conviction for perjury and the recent confession of the Soviet atomic spy Klaus Fuchs, these charges put Acheson on the defensive and would eventually lead to extensive investigations of the State Department. For more on this, see Schrecker, Many are the Crimes, pp. 240-265.

recent Soviet foreign policy initiatives, seventy percent of Americans said they believed that Moscow’s goal was to “rule the world.” That number climbed to seventy-three percent among the college educated. In light of this, it is no surprise that the public supported NSC-68’s initiatives, even if they would not actually read the classified document for another twenty-five years. Seventy-three percent of surveyed Americans supported the hydrogen bomb program, and while forty-eight percent of Americans preferred an international agreement with Moscow on nuclear weaponry, seventy percent of those who supported the hydrogen bomb program believed no accommodation with the Soviet Union was possible. Almost seven out of every ten Americans believed the Soviets would use the bomb against the U.S. if it was in their possession.86

Citizens’ concerns about Communism only strengthened over the course of 1950. While Truman initially adopted a wait-and-see attitude toward NSC-68’s budget increases, the American people endorsed that principle.87 In late March, Gallup reported that sixty-three percent of Americans thought the government should increase spending on national defense.88 A year after the formation of NATO, the American people supported that organization seven to one, while a majority of those polled in May endorsed the “total mobilization of all [able] United States citizens” to be ready for

86 Gallup Gallup Poll, pp. 853, 863, 873-874, 881, 888, 894
87 The President to the Executive Secretary of the National Security Council (Lay), April 12, 1950, FRUS 1950, vol. I, pp. 234-235. In this note, Truman explained his concerns about NSC-68 strains on the budget. He did not object to its conclusions or state any opposition to its interpretation of the Soviet Union. He only asked for further information, as well as for the inclusion of the Bureau of the Budget and the Council of Economic Advisers in future discussions. Truman eventually signed off on NSC-68 in the aftermath of the war in Korea. It remains unclear if the document’s increased spending on the military would have been approved in the absence of that conflict. For Truman’ approval of NSC-68 recommendations as official policy see Report to the National Security Council by the Executive Secretary (Lay), September 30, 1950, FRUS, 1950, vol. I, p. 400.
88 Gallup, Gallup Poll, pp. 906-907, 912, 920.
another war. Americans may not have read NSC-68, but they unsurprisingly believed in its message. This is unsurprising for it reflected archetypes that ran deep within Americans’ historical and cultural consciousness.

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In light of the sizable amount of resources allocated to the military and the arms race between 1945 and 1991, it is easy to overlook that when NSC-68 landed on Truman’s desk in April of 1950, the Cold War was still largely a political conflict. Between 1945 and 1950, the U.S. armed forces demobilized and American troops came home from Europe and the Far East in large numbers. Until the summer of 1950, the Cold War remained exactly what George Kennan had expected it to be: a psychological struggle waged primarily by political and economic means. That mirage shattered in June 1950 in the valleys and mountains of Korea.

The U.S. response to the North Korean attack on the Republic of South Korea on June 25, 1950 was shaped by Americans’ sense of missionary responsibility and their perception of enemies constituting a threat to the American way of life. Although the Korean peninsula was of only marginal strategic importance, the psychological significance of the war proved immeasurable. Only six months earlier, Secretary of State Dean Acheson had publicly explained that while Japan and the Philippines fell within the American “defensive perimeter” in the Far East, Syngman Rhee’s South Korea, Chiang Kai-Shek’s Taiwan, and mainland Asia in general, would have to “rely upon the commitments of the entire civilized world under the Charter of the United Nations” for
their security. This was a very Kennan-esque interpretation of the Asian situation that the author of the containment doctrine unsurprisingly favored. Once they learned of the Communist attack, however, Kennan and Acheson abandoned their realist position without hesitation. Both concurred that military action to defend Korea was necessary and that support of Chiang Kai-Shek and the Chinese nationalists was vital. Throughout the Administration, the consensus was that losing territory in Asia to the Communists would deliver a tremendous psychological and ideological defeat to America’s role in the world. NSC-68’s perspective that a victory for Communism anywhere was a loss for the free world everywhere proved dominant.

Within hours after the U.S. Embassy in Seoul confirmed the attack on South Korea, State Department officials informed U.N. Secretary General Trygve Lie of the event and requested an urgent meeting of the United Nations Security Council. The Council met that same day in what was only its second emergency session since its founding. Although Stalin and Mao did not initiate the attack on South Korea, they had known of and sanctioned North Korean leader Kim Il Sung’s war plans. But all three leaders underestimated both Americans’ refusal to let South Korea fall and the United Nations’ ability to act. In protest of the U.N.’s refusal to recognize Mao’s government

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90 Gaddis, George F. Kennan, pp. 395-397.
91 Oral Interview with John D. Hickerson. HSTL, Oral History Collection. For Secretary General Trygve Lie’s recollection of events, see his In the Cause of Peace: Seven Years with the United Nations (New York: Macmillan, 1954), pp. 323-348, in particular, pp. 327-329.
92 We now know that Acheson’s speech to the National Press Club influenced Moscow and Beijing’s endorsement of the North Korean attack. More influential, it can be presumed, was the withdrawal of U.S. troops from South Korea. For more on this, see Kathryn Weathersby, “Soviet Aims in Korea and the
as the representative of China, the Soviet Union had been boycotting the Security Council for six months when the war began. Consequently, the Soviet Ambassador was unable to veto the American effort, and on June 26, the Security Council adopted a U.S. sponsored resolution calling for North Korea to “cease hostilities” and withdraw to the thirty-eighth parallel. The American representative, Ernest Gross – Ambassador Austin was in Vermont at the time the Council convened – powerfully highlighted the U.N.’s mission and the significance of international law, insisting that the organization could not abandon “a nation brought into being by the United Nations” only two years earlier.93 When Pyongyang ignored the resolution, the U.N. called on its members to “furnish such assistance to the Republic of Korea as may be necessary to repel the armed attack and to restore international peace.”94 Within days, U.S. armed forces that were on occupation duty in Japan, under the auspices of the U.N., engaged the Communists on the Korean peninsula.

The American decision to seek action through the United Nations rather than the U.S. Congress symbolized the importance that the creators of the postwar order attached...
to the organization. As John D. Hickerson later recalled it, “the first thing, the UN, was just automatic. I mean it was aggression, and that we knew we were going to do.” The U.N. considered the Republic of Korea, which contained the vast majority of the population and a democratically elected government, “the only… government in Korea.” Truman was in Missouri at the time of the attack, but none of his advisors doubted that action through the U.N. was the President’s preferred choice. They were right. Truman, according to the State Department’s Phillips Jessup, was determined that the U.S. did not “let the U.N. down.” “I did this [italics in original] for the United Nations,” Truman told Hickerson shortly after the decision to intervene. “I believed in the League of Nations. It failed…we [the U.S.] started the United Nations. It was our idea.”

More was at stake, of course, than the United Nations’ status and accountability. Inside and outside of government, Americans viewed the North Korean attack through the prism of the Communist threat to global freedom. Only a week prior to the attack, the CIA had described North Korea as “a firmly controlled Soviet satellite” and dismissed the chance of a military assault. This assessment was significant not only because it was wrong, but also because it explains why Washington, from the beginning, treated the war in Korea as a Cold War battle ground rather than a civil conflict. The consensus was that Moscow sought world domination. Korea, it appeared, was merely the first step in that direction. John Foster Dulles, traveling in Asia along with the State Department’s

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95 Oral Interview with John D. Hickerson. HSTL, Oral History Collection.
Director of North East Asian Affairs, John M. Allison, at the time of the attack, relayed to Acheson that “to sit by while Korea is overrun by unprovoked armed attack would start disastrous chain of events leading most probably to world war.” The Secretary of State concurred. In Acheson’s view, the fight was with “the second team, whereas the real enemy is the Soviet Union.”97 Truman agreed as well. In a conversation with George Elsey on the day after the war began, the President “walked over to the globe standing in front of the fireplace and said that he was more worried about other parts of the world.” Looking at the Middle East, he said, here “is where they will start trouble if we aren’t careful.” “Korea,” the President explained to Elsey, “is the Greece of the Far East. If we are tough enough now, if we stand up to them like we did in Greece three years ago, they won’t take any next steps.”98

At home, the media and the public’s immediate response mirrored the President’s. No one doubted that Moscow was behind the war. Whenever mentioned in the reports of the war, Kim Il Sung’s regime was portrayed as a mere Soviet puppet. The Washington Post instantly concluded that “the Russians have put themselves in the wrong.” As a result, Asian nations would not hesitate to support “a firm American policy of antiagression.” The columnist believed that Moscow had “engaged in a test of the American intention” for the world. “There can be no hesitation when so much is at stake. In this crisis the Government must act…so boldly as to leave nobody in suspense, let

98 Memorandum: President Truman’s Conversation with George M. Elsey, June 26, 1950. HSTL, George M. Elsey Papers, Box 71.
alone Russia.” Echoing this sentiment, the New York Times hoped “that the Soviet Government will...arrive at an answer which will put an end to the present slaughter and save the peace of the world.” Life too detected international Communism’s global design behind the operation. A two-page map sketched how Communist aggression could be expected to develop across Asia. It presented Korea as only one front in a Communist offensive already being waged by Ho Chi Minh in South East Asia that would soon include Malaya and Burma and then threaten India. The significance of the U.S. and U.N. action was “to dampen a small explosion before it became a big one– before Communist aggression moved elsewhere in Asia and blew up most of the Orient.”99 Truman, in a principled echo of Theodore Roosevelt’s visions for international order, termed the U.N. operation in Korea a “police action” against Communist “bandits.”100

On July 6, the National Security Council explained to the President that the war “unmasked the great and growing combined military strength of Soviet Russia” and “its willing and ambitious satellites.” While the U.N. forces could stop aggression in Korea, it warned that the free world was incapable of adequately responding “if the Russians reimpose[d] the Berlin blockade” or moved against democracies elsewhere. As it had done in NSC-68, the Council reiterated that when “they believe they are ready, the Soviet Union plans to attack the United States, because it is their often reiterated intention to rule the world.” In the interim, “the Soviet Union can be expected to harass the United States through such satellites as North Korea, communist China, and eastern

Germany.”\textsuperscript{101} The Central Intelligence Agency similarly estimated that “the basic Soviet objectives in launching the North Korean attack” were to “test the strength of U.S. commitments” and to prepare “for the further expansion of Communism in Asia and Europe by undermining the confidence of non-Communist states in the value of U.S. support.”\textsuperscript{102} There was “little doubt,” Acheson concluded to British Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin in early July – long before China entered the war, – that “Communism with China as the spearhead, has now embarked upon an assault against Asia, with immediate objectives in Korea, Indo-China, Burma, the Philippines and Malaya and with medium-range objectives in Hong Kong, Indonesia, Siam, India, and Japan.”\textsuperscript{103} President Eisenhower may have been the first to define the Domino Theory but its logic was prevalent during the Truman era as well.

On July 19, in a special message to Congress – and in a subsequent radio address to the American people, – Truman defined the war as a Communist attack against the legitimate government of Korea. “The free nations face a world-wide threat. It must be met with a world-wide defense.” Communist leaders, by “their actions in Korea…have demonstrated their contempt for the basic moral principles on which the United Nations is founded. This is a direct challenge to the efforts of the free nations to build the kind of world in which men can live in peace and freedom.” Korea was “a warning that there may be similar acts of aggression in other parts of the world. The free nations must be on

\textsuperscript{101} Memorandum: Suggested Action by the NSC for Consideration of the President in Light of the Korean Situation.” HSTL, Harry S. Truman Papers, President’s Secretary’s Files, Box 159.
\textsuperscript{102} Central Intelligence Agency Memorandum no. 302: Consequences of the Korean Incident, July 8, 1950. HSTL, Harry S. Truman Papers, NSC Papers, Box 10.
their guard, more than ever before, against this kind of sneak attack.” 104 Although unaware of the NSC’s deliberations, Senator Lodge concurred with its evaluations. Korea, he believed, was simply the beginning; perhaps, it was even a diversion. He applauded Truman’s resolve, but he warned that the “situation with regards to Europe is potentially a thousand times more portentous and dangerous than the situation in Korea. The point of the Soviet arrow is not aimed at Korea or at Formosa or at Indo-China or at Iran: It is aimed at West-Germany.” 105

Many intellectuals shared these views. Sidney Hook, Arthur Schlesinger Jr., James Burnham and many others from the United States and Western Europe were attending a conference in West Berlin just as the war began. The conference was designed to serve as a liberal democratic counterstrike against the WPC conferences, and, according to Hook, the news of the war only “gave a fillip to the spirit of the delegates.” In exposed West Berlin, the attendees half expected to be arrested by the MVD. The consensus at the conference was that in the current struggle, mankind faced an “either or” choice in the world. Freedom or totalitarianism. Nothing less than the entire free way of life was at stake. In light of the Kremlin’s “crusade for world power,” the political theorist James Burnham dismissed any notion of neutrality. He explained that he was not opposed “under any and all circumstances to the use of atomic bombs.” “I am against those bombs now stored or to be stored in Siberia which are designed for the destruction of Paris, London, Rome, New York, and of Western civilization generally. I am...for

those bombs made in Los Alamos, Hanford, and Oak Ridge…[which] have been the sole
defense of – the liberties of Western Europe.” In “World War III: The Ideological
Conflict,” William Barrett praised the Administration’s response to the Communists. “At
last,” he insisted, the authorities seem to be waking up to realize how badly the U.S. has
been beaten in the battle of ideas.”

According to the Washington Post, Truman’s public announcements “put
aggressive communism on notice that it must reckon with American might no less than
American principle.” The newspaper insisted that there “is neither belligerence nor
imperialism [in the U.S. attitude]. But while the United States wants no additional
territory, it will not stand by and see one free country after another overrun by puppets of
the Kremlin.” Life, a magazine that had been critical of Truman’s Asia policy in the past,
took a similar stand. Luce’s magazine summed up “the reaction of the plain man” with a
simple exclamation: “[A]t last!” According to its editorial board, both “the president and
the plain man are to be congratulated: the President for the courage of the decision and
the plain man for…good judgment on a very complicated matter.” The reference to the
plain man’s “good judgment,” in Life’s view, was not misplaced. Americans interpreted
the war in Korea as part of a global war. According to Gallup, three out of four

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(September/October, 1950; William Barrett, “World War III: The Ideological Conflict,” Partisan Review,
XVII (September/October, 1950); James Burnham, “Rhetoric and Peace,” Partisan Review, XVII
(November/December, 1950). The Conference in Berlin received support from the Central Intelligence
Agency, though most participants were unaware of this. This funding from the intelligence community did
not create the anti-communist atmosphere, however. That had been established long before the CIA began
funding cultural projects. For more on this, see Michael Warner, “Origins of the Congress on Cultural
Conspiracy: The Congress for Cultural Freedom and the Struggle for the Mind of Postwar Europe (The

Americans supported military intervention in Korea. Sixty-eight percent thought it more important to stop Communist expansion in Europe and Asia than to keep out of war. By eight to one Americans supported a U.S. declaration of war against the Soviet Union if the Red Army attempted to take control of West Berlin. NATO’s approval rating jumped above eighty percent with the start of the war. The U.N.’s popularity increased as well with over eighty percent of Americans – ninety-four percent of the college educated – believing that the United Nations should create a military force ready to be deployed anywhere in the world.\footnote{U.S. Department of State, \textit{Monthly Survey of American Opinion} (August, 1950), pp. 1-3.}

Korea confirmed the American citizens’ fear that the Soviet Union threatened the American way of life in the world. Sixty-six percent believed Russia would use atomic bombs against American cities if capable of doing so, and over eighty percent believed that the Soviet Union aimed to become the world’s ruling power. Fifty-seven percent thought they were now in World War III, and only twenty-eight percent believed the war would not escalate into a full scale global conflict. By the time the Chinese Communists entered the war on North Korea’s side in November 1950, eighty-one percent of Americans believed that Mao was acting on Stalin’s orders. In light of these fears, Americans were willing to make sacrifices. Although Congress had opposed a push by the Truman Administration to introduce Universal Military Training in 1948 and 1949, seventy-eight percent of Americans in early July approved of this measure. Over seventy percent of Americans, according to Gallup, favored higher taxes for a military buildup. By the end of the year, fifty percent favored the Truman Administration’s decision to
double the size of the armed forces to approximately three million men. Thirty-three percent did not think that number sufficient.\textsuperscript{109}

When combined with the media’s coverage of the war and the Administration’s stance, these extensive poll numbers show a tremendous degree of clarity in American ideological thinking by 1950. The American public embraced a mission, and the protection of that mission, that went far beyond Korea. As Acheson relayed it privately to Bevin, the U.S. believed “that the whole future of the free world is at stake.” Reflecting this sense of duty, \textit{Life’s} editors enthusiastically defined the Korean moment as an inspiration and a challenge. The United States’ responsibility was not only to protect the weaker nations “against all outside Communist aggression,” but to also “work with them to help them build up their political economies against the dangers of chaos and overthrow from within. It is a mighty job – a mighty tough one, a mighty interesting one. In the doing of this job, we shall gain as a nation more than we give. We shall gain in the broadening of our participation in the whole human adventure.”\textsuperscript{110}

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Despite the initial enthusiasm, Korea eventually became the forgotten war. In American memory, it appeared as nothing more than a footnote between the Second World War and Vietnam. It produced neither the victory culture of the former nor the humiliation of the latter. As the war dragged on into 1951 and 1952, any hopes for victory faded. Meanwhile, at home, McCarthy’s attacks on the Democrats and the State Department intensified and Truman’s popularity plummeted. In March 1952, Truman announced that

\textsuperscript{109} Gallup, \textit{Gallup Poll}, pp. 951, 955

he would not seek another term as President. But if Harry Truman was a casualty of the
Korean War it was his handling of it, not the ideology behind it, that Americans turned
against. Four years after the Korean War truce, John Foster Dulles, now Secretary of
State, echoed Nitze’s views to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. International
Communism, Dulles explained, “is a conspiracy.” Its leaders “have gotten control of one
government after another. They first got control of Russia after the First World War.
They have gone on getting control of one country and another…International
communism is still a group which is seeking to control the world.”

The ideals that inspired NSC-68 and Point Four continued to dominate U.S.
foreign policy in the years and decades ahead. Beginning with the war in Korea,
Americans placed South Korea and Taiwan within their defense perimeter, began
rearming West Germany, brought non-Atlantic nations like Turkey and Greece into
NATO, deployed troops to Western Europe under NATO command, and eventually
extended their influence in the Middle East, and expanded their nuclear arsenal. They
finalized a peace treaty with Japan – without Moscow’s acquiescence – and brought
Indochina into the Western defense system under the South East Asia Treaty
Organization. Accompanying these national security measures was an increasingly
extensive mission of global meliorism aimed. Point Four soon ran up a 155 million dollar
annual tab, with Truman’s immediate successors – Dwight Eisenhower, John F.
Kennedy, and every President since – extending this aid, albeit in different forms, with a

dogged meliorist view. The creation of the U.S. Agency for International Development, the Peace Corps, and the Alliance for Progress soon followed, along with Walt Rostow’s full-fledged plans to modernize backwards countries. Communism’s rise undoubtedly gave these policies renewed impetus and helped institutionalize them; however, meliorism in American thought went back much further than the establishment of the international Communist movement and has long outlived it. Though Americans have proven relatively incapable and often impatient nation-builders, they have continued their missionary efforts nevertheless. The assumption that progress is always possible and that it in some form is an American responsibility has never strayed far from their view of global developments.

When NSC-68 was finally declassified in 1975 – less than six weeks before the final Americans hastily abandoned Saigon – scholars from virtually every Cold War school of thought joined Kennan and Bohlen in lamenting its ideological tone and its overestimation of Soviet intentions and capabilities. Samuel Wells, Jr. called it an “amazingly incomplete and amateurish study” that overdrew the “evil nature of the Communist bloc” and overlooked that “many nations in the ‘free world’” had “no democratic or responsible government.” John Lewis Gaddis concurred. So did Andrew Bacevich and many others. In the aftermath of the Soviet Union’s relatively quiet

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113 For an excellent discussion of the often overlooked meliorist U.S. foreign policy tradition see, McDougall, Promised Land, Crusader State, pp. 172-198.
collapse, many have assumed that ulterior motives must have been behind the presentation of the Soviet Union in this exaggerated light.\textsuperscript{114}

At least part of the reason for this can be located in diplomatic historians’ aversion to the influence of ideas and their lack of appreciation for historical and cultural consciousness. Too great an emphasis on rearmament, national security, and economics – while important – misses the point that despite all of NSC-68’s blustering rhetoric about Stalin’s build-up, the heart of the document reflected the heart of America. NSC-68, read in conjunction with the national response inside and outside of government to the outbreak of hostilities in Korea, appears to be more of an exposé of the American mind than an analysis of the Soviet Union’s policies. Its ideological tone reflected the mutual exclusiveness of the two universal faiths. The Soviet Union was not only an existential threat but an obstacle to America’s global role as well. For one to prosper the other had to perish. This was why containment was not enough. NSC-68’s message tapped an ideological vein that ran along the long axis of America’s past. The Second World War had confirmed the American synthesis of righteousness and responsibility. As Truman expressed it in 1948, “the danger that threatens us in the world is utterly and totally opposed to [Christian values]. The international Communist movement is based on a fierce and terrible fanaticism. It denies the existence of God and where it can it stamps out the worship of God.” Truman did not doubt that God had created Americans or that

he had “brought us to our present position of power and strength for some great purpose.”115 This is exceptionalism personified.

Critics may argue that the East Coast Groton- and Ivy League-educated policymaking elite that had long dominated U.S. foreign policy believed that the average citizen would never understand the complexities of the global order and, as a result, must be fed simplified arguments designed for national consumption. Certainly, Acheson and Dulles and the vast majority of members of Truman’s Administration (though not the President or Clark Clifford) were cut from cloth of East Coast elitism much the same that Wilson and Theodore Roosevelt’s cabinets had been before them. We should be cautious, however, to dismiss their rhetoric as mere tools designed to deceive. It is worth remembering, as Bruce Kuklick points out, that those very East Coast “institutions – Harvard, Yale, and Princeton, chief among them – were founded to…carry sacred views into the profane world.”116 In any case, as the polls presented above indicate, the gap between citizens and policymakers on America’s global role was insubstantial. American ideology, ideology carried forward from the nation’s founding, ensured that the American people did not need much convincing, let alone an Ivy League education, to believe that theirs was a special mission and that their economic and political principles were universally valid. They overwhelmingly, and with little resistance, embraced the Cold War logic because it confirmed their own identity. The Cold War of NSC-68 and Korea may have made Americans fearful, but it also inspired a purpose Americans longed for. It

115 PPP, Harry S. Truman, 1951, pp. 548-549.
116 For Bruce Kuklick’s comments see, May, American Cold War Strategy, p. 159.
epitomized the way Americans thought of their own role in the world. In that sense, it did not change Americans, it allowed Americans to be themselves.
Conclusion

Reinhold Niebuhr’s *The Irony of American History* may well be most eloquent exposé of American exceptionalist ideals. Rolling off the presses in the midst of the Korean War, the book bared the roots and inherent dangers of the mythology of greatness that the American people so wholeheartedly embraced.¹ Niebuhr did not describe Americans’ liberal, optimistic world-view that reached maturity in the early Cold War years as an ideology per se, but his work exposes the nature of America’s national self-perception in a manner similar to that of the preceding chapters. His philosophical framework is one to which scholars interested in both the overlap between diplomatic and intellectual history and the influences of Americans’ ideas on the exercise of power can turn if they seek an explanation for the undercurrents of the United States’ role in the world. Almost two decades earlier, Niebuhr had argued that “man” will only discover “a progressively higher justice and more stable peace…[if he] does not attempt the impossible.”² By the time he completed *The Irony of American History*, he saw little hope that Americans – now at the pinnacle of global power – would show such prudence. He chastised Americans’ sense of chosenness, their naïve conviction that they possessed the power and the foresight to impose human will on history, and their outright refusal to recognize their own limitations.³

³ Niebuhr’s works went through a revival in the aftermath of the recent wars in the Middle East when the George W. Bush Administration refused to yield any of these warnings. For more on this, see Andrew J. Bacevich’s introduction to the reprint of *The Irony of American History* (University of Chicago Press, 2008), pp. ix-xx; *Reinhold Niebuhr and Contemporary Politics: God and Power* by Richard Harris and Stephen Pletten eds. (Oxford University Press, 2010).
In precision and prescience, Niebuhr’s work is rivaled perhaps only by Alexander Solzhenitsyn’s works on the Soviet Union. Indeed, the two men’s despondent interpretations of the two Cold War rivals appear in many ways strikingly similar. Solzhenitsyn criticized the Soviet system for believing in Communism’s ability to create and navigate the human order of things and warned of the consequences that follow when ideologues dismiss the need for “repentance” or refuse to impose “self-limitation.” Given his disdain for the Soviet ideology, the Russian dissident – an inmate of the Soviet Gulag system when *The Irony of American History* went to print – would have understood exactly what the American theologian meant when he criticized the “deep layer of Messianic consciousness in the mind of America” and prophetically warned that the extension of power, especially in the name of good, always carried the potential for evil. Graham Greene, in his 1955 novel *The Quiet American*, captured this exact portrait of the United States in the shape of a young American named Alden Pyle. Attempting to bring democracy to South East Asia, Pyle’s idealism, naiveté, and righteousness merge to produce a protagonist capable of doing evil in the name of good.4

Niebuhr’s call for humility and modesty in American foreign affairs was admirable but self-effacement has never been an American virtue. Niebuhr, in effect, was asking Americans to be something that they were not. As this dissertation shows, Americans’ perception of international Communism as a universal threat to freedom along with their intense sense of missionary responsibility overpowered realism and often

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prudence. One example of this came in October 1951 when the editors’ of *Collier’s* magazine dedicated an entire issue to the imagined scenario of “Russia’s Defeat and Occupation, 1952-1960.” The contributors, which included influential writers such as Edward Murrow, Hal Boyle, Arthur Koestler, and Robert Sherwood, envisioned a Third World War in response to Soviet aggression in Europe. The imagined outcome was an American victory followed by the military occupation of the Soviet Union by armed forces of the United Nations. As had been done in Germany after 1945, the authors prophesized that the result of the war would be an American-inspired democratic reconstruction of the Soviet Union and that freedom of religion and press would inevitably follow as Communism collapsed. Moscow, Washington, Chicago, and other major cities would fall victim to atomic bombs in the process, but by 1960, as Robert Sherwood foresaw it in his essay, “the light” of freedom “would be shining in Russia, and in all other darkened places of the earth.”

This principle of global meliorism as a Cold War strategy and as a foreign policy justification, found support from Massachusetts Institute of Technology professor Walt W. Rostow, whose works sought to provide a roadmap for providing American-style modernization to all peoples. Rostow considered modernization to be part of Americans’ historical and cultural consciousness and believed it could be an exportable product that would improve the world, cement American preeminence, and contain Communism.

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5 Collier’s, October 27, 1951; Kennan unsurprisingly lamented the aggressive nature of *Collier’s*’ articles. For more on this see his *Memoirs, 1950-1963* (Pantheon, 1983), pp. 100n-101n. CBS’ Edward Murrow, perhaps the most famed news correspondent in the United States at the time, later regretted his own participation in *Collier’s* project; not because of its ideological message but because of the atomic war scenario that the authors appeared to support. For more on this see, A. M. Sperber, *Murrow: His Life and Times* (Fordham University Press, 1999), pp. 368-369.
Together with his MIT colleague Max Millikan, Rostow co-authored *A Proposal: A Key to an Effective Foreign Policy* in 1957. In a language reminiscent of Truman’s Point Four program, their book called for Americans to aid the less developed world through the spread of U.S. ingenuity. The ability to do so, the authors insisted, “lies in the fact that we have developed more successfully than any other nation the social, political, and economic techniques for realizing widespread popular desires for change without…social disorganization.” They called on the United States “to give fresh meaning and vitality to the historic American sense of mission – a mission to see the principles of national independence and human liberty extended on the world scene.”

This idea, which Rostow brought to the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations in the sixties, signaled that the Cold War in American thought never revolved exclusively around the containment of Communism, access and markets for American trade, or, despite the unprecedented vulnerability exposed by the conflict, around national security. Though the Cold War was about all of this these things, in the hearts and minds of Americans, it was also a mission for the world.

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This American missionary impulse proved especially powerful through the period of postwar planning and into the early Cold War that followed. This period, analyzed

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thoroughly in this study, was the first – to use a term that became popular after the end of the Cold War – “uni-polar moment” during which the United States envisioned the rest of the world, including the Soviets and the former European powers, to be moving toward more equitable and progressive models. It was this sense of exceptionalism that led Americans to view their victory in the Second World War as evidence of their nation’s greatness and global responsibility. This belief found its most vivid expressions in the design of, and the expectations placed on, the new international order and the institutions – most notable the United Nations and the Bretton Woods institutions – created to oversee it. This one-world order was always intended to align closely with American ideals; it was meant to be driven by the American principles of liberty, freedom, economic growth, free trade and provide access to markets and securing human rights.

This postwar design cannot, of course, be reduced to a simple philanthropic mission. Americans sought international collaboration on U.S. terms and never overlooked the benefits such collaboration would provide them. But as shown in these chapters, Americans truly believed that their efforts could improve the world. They expected progress to come not only in mammon – though Americans have always linked wealth to progress – but in the confirmation of their nation’s exceptionalism as well. The apostles for progress never doubted that the world would be better off if others embraced American ideals. Few Americans questioned that only the United States possessed the authority, altruism, wealth, and virtue to reform the regions, nations, and continents of the world. That is why this study describes United States’ foreign policy as principally

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ideological in nature. Over time, American foreign policy has been laced with a faith and a mission similar to that of the other major ideological forces of the twentieth century: a determination that theirs’ is the responsibility to alter the course of human history and provide for mankind an end-destination.

In his 1955 work, *The Liberal Tradition in America*, the eminent historian Louis Hartz questioned just this kind of arrogance. Though Americans may choose to herald themselves as pragmatists rather than ideologues, he argued that this national self-perception was “deceptive because, glacierlike” it “rested on miles of submerged conviction” that American virtues are superior. “When one’s ultimate values are accepted everywhere one looks, the absolute language of self-evidence comes easily enough,” Hartz presciently explained. Like Niebuhr, Hartz firmly supported democracy, but he considered Americans’ veneration of liberal ideals rather naïve. He insisted that “even a good idea can be a little frightening when it is the only idea a [nation] has ever had.” Hartz worried that that the “liberal idea” had “utter dominion over the American mind” and had, as a result, caused Americans’ overwhelming faith in the superiority of their values to become hubristic.8

In recent years, it has become popular to characterize the United States as an empire. The universality of the American mission presented here, however, should cause scholars to consider if this label, with all its connotations, is actually appropriate. The point is not that the United States and the Soviet Union did not, at times, act in a manner comparable to the European empires – they did – but that something is lost when we

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assign such a narrow portrayal to these powers. In contrast to the British and the French empires, which acquired their sense of mission and social consciousness largely as an addendum to an operation already underway, the United States and the Soviet Union, for better or for worse, embraced a mission for influence and world improvement that was always a part of their ideological consciousness. ⁹ This undoubtedly must have seemed like a distinction without a difference to those nations that faced the brunt of American military and economic might. Recognizing this, however, is essential if we hope to understand what drives, and has driven, Americans’ role in the world. The empire thesis may explain why the United States entered the Philippines at the end of the nineteenth century, but not why it spent the next forty years modernizing the country. Likewise, U.S. Cold War policy cannot accurately be characterized as solely imperial or as a mere exercise on behalf of American businesses. Neither the United Nations nor the Bretton Woods institutions provided the United States the sort of exclusive control that the European imperialists had acquired previously. Instead, these organizations heavily favored the less developed nations, at least in comparison to the position these nations had held prior to the outbreak of the Second World War.

Ideology provides, in my view, a more convincing explanation for America’s perception of its own place in the world. Americans viewed Moscow as a global threat to their mission, because Communism possessed a universal undertaking similar to their own. This was why there could be no modus vivendi with the Soviet Union. Once Stalin abandoned the liberal international economic order, constrained the United Nations’

⁹ For two excellent chapters discussing this as it relates to both the United States and the Soviet Union, see Westad, *The Global Cold War*, pp. 8-72.
functional ability, rejected international oversight of atomic energy and weapons, and appeared – from Washington’s vantage point at least – set on pursuing traditional Communist expansion, the United States quickly turned the Cold War into an ideological conflict in which every nation and every territory assumed a tremendous psychological significance. The Truman Doctrine, Point Four, NSC-68, and the American response to the war in Korea were just the beginning. In the years that followed, the determination that Americans were in a battle for their very way of life caused Washington to guarantee Taiwan and West Berlin’s safety, intervene in Vietnam, and determine that insignificant nations like Guatemala, Chile, and Nicaragua could not be allowed to toe the Communist line. To Americans, the Cold War was a struggle between good and evil that was incomparable to anything the European imperial powers had been involved in, at least since the great wars of religion.

Hartz hoped that Americans would eventually become a more liberal-minded society— one more tolerable and less fearful of others’ ideas, one that did not equate “the alien with the unintelligible,” and one that did not turn “eccentricity into sin.” At stake in the postwar order, he concluded, was “nothing less than a new level of consciousness, a transcending of irrational” ideals “in which an understanding of self and an understanding of others go hand in hand.”

The end of the Cold War has left little reason to suspect that Americans will turn in such a tolerant direction. By 1991, as the Soviet Union collapsed, it was clear that the humiliation of Vietnam was just a temporary blip in Americans’ memories, comparable perhaps to the distaste many had felt during the Mexican-

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10 Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition*, pp. 11-12, 308-309.
American War, the war in the Philippines, or the interwar opposition to Wilson’s Great War. Even if many Americans acknowledged the sins of Vietnam, victory in the Cold War seemed to only confirm their own righteousness. Francis Fukuyama spoke of the end of the Cold War as a total victory for liberalism; the neo-conservative William Kristol called for the establishment of “benevolent hegemony” over the world; Madeleine Albright defined America as the indispensable nation, asserting that the United States’ “stand tall and...see further than other countries into the future;” Anthony Lake, Bill Clinton’s National Security Advisor, called for “enlargement” to expand democracies and liberal economies; and, soon after, the George W. Bush’s Administration, along with many intellectuals, called for an expansion of American values and the democratization of the Middle East.11 The era between the end of the Cold War and the outbreak of the War on Terror only confirmed exceptionalism’s permanency in American thought and the influence it has on American foreign policy. Hartz and Niebuhr, it would appear, had indeed asked Americans to be something they are not.

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EDUCATION:

Ph.D. Boston University, Department of History, September, 2013.

Exam Committee: Professors William R. Keylor (primary advisor), Andrew J. Bacevich, David Mayers, Bruce Schulman, and Erik Goldstein


M.A. McGill University, Department of History, 2007.

Dean’s List

M.A. University of Southern Denmark, Department of History, 2002.

B.A. University of Southern Denmark, Department of History, 1999.

PUBLICATIONS:

Peer-reviewed journal articles


Book reviews


F A C U L T Y   P O S I T I O N S:

Boston University, Lecturer
“History of International Relations, 1900-1945,” Summer 2012.

Bentley University, Adjunct Professor

Vietnam National University (Ho Chi Minh City), Center for Int. Education, Lecturer

Boston University, Department of History, Fall 2009-Spring 2012.
Teaching Fellow

McGill University, Department of History, Fall 2006-Spring 2007.
Teaching Assistant

Guest Lectures:

“The End of Détente and the Soviet Union’s War in Afghanistan”
For Professor Simon Rabinovitch, Boston University, April 6, 2013.

“Dissidents in the Soviet Union”
For Professor Simon Rabinovitch, Boston University, April 3, 2013.

“World War I and the American Economy”
For Professor Louis Ferleger, Boston University, May 23, 2012.

For Professor Erik Goldstein, Boston University, April 26, 2012.

“Emerging Centers of Power: Japan and the United States”
For Professor Ellen H. Wald, Boston University, May 19, 2010.

Invited Talks:

“The American Mind and U.S. Foreign Policy” (Works in Progress Series)
Roger Williams University, Bristol, RI, April 17, 2013.
TEACHING FELLOW:

History of International Relations, 1900-1945, Boston University, w/Professor Erik Goldstein.

History of War, Boston University, w/Professor Cathal J. Nolan.

History of International Relations, 1945-present, Boston University, w/Professor William R. Keylor.

History of International Relations, 1900-1945, Boston University, w/Professor William R. Keylor.

The United States since 1865, McGill University, w/Professor Gil Troy.

History of International Relations, 1945-present: The Cold War, McGill University, w/Professor Lorenz M. Luthi.

CONFERENCES:


Nominated for best Graduate Student Paper

ADVISING:

Advisor and Oral Committee Examiner on Undergraduate Work for Distinction, Boston University, Spring 2011: Cristina C. Inceu, Family Planning Policies and Women’s Childcare Choices in Romania.

Advisor and Oral Committee Examiner on Undergraduate Work for Distinction, Boston University, Spring 2011: Scott L. Haviland, Belgian Waffling: Political Indecision in Northern Europe.

HONORS & AWARDS:

Robert V. Shotwell Dissertation Fellowship, Boston University, 2012-2013.
The Engelbourg Travel Fellowship, Boston University, 2011.
Outstanding Teaching Fellow of the Year, Boston University, Department of History, 2010-2011.

Dean’s Fellowship, Boston University, 2008-2011.

OTHER PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES:

Panel Chair/Commentator, New England Historical Association Bi-Annual Conference, Fall 2012: “The Cold War.”

Chair, International History Institute, 2nd Annual Professor & Graduate Student Conference, Hancock, NH, Fall 2012: “American Exceptionalism.”

Associate Editor, Southern Historian, 2011-present.

LANGUAGES:

Fluent: German, Danish, Swedish, and Norwegian. Research proficient: French.

PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS:

Society for Historians of American of Foreign Relations
American Historical Association