

UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

We Hold These Truths: The Truman Administration, Responsible Power,
and the Reinvention of American Foreign Relations

by

Adrian U-Jin Ang

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Abstract

There are few subjects in international politics that are as fraught with tension and controversy than the study of the role of morality in international affairs and the ethical conduct of statecraft. This thesis argues that ethical statecraft is indelibly linked to its practice and is possible within the context of a casuistic understanding of morality that places premiums on prudence, judgment, and a sensitivity to prevailing circumstances. The thesis examines early Cold War American foreign policy under Harry Truman and other American statesmen. In the attempt to cultivate policies that were prudent yet morally principled, American statesmen were confronted with the perennial dilemmas generated by the competing claims of security and morality. American statesmen were never able to fully resolve those tensions; American statecraft reflected the compromises made with the prevailing circumstances. Despite compromises, however, American statesmen were able to exercise power and conduct statecraft in a responsible fashion that combined American idealism and self-interests, in a manner appropriate to the circumstances they faced and the exigencies of the time.

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For my parents,
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Abbreviations

DSB	Department of State Bulletin.
FP	The Federalist Papers.
FRUS	Foreign Relations of the United States.
PAH	The Papers of Alexander Hamilton.
PPPUS: HST	Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Harry S. Truman, 1945-1953.
WGW	The Writings of George Washington.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

It must be considered that there is nothing more difficult to carry out, nor more doubtful of success, nor more dangerous to handle, than to initiate a new order of things.

- Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*

How is it possible to create the beginnings of international order out of the nations of this world? Not out of a world of pacifists, nor out of a world of Quakers, but out of this world, which contains only a small minority of pacifists and Quakers. For it is peace on earth that men need, not peace in heaven, and unless you build from the brutalities of earth, you step into empty space.

- Theodore Roosevelt

Attempts at creating a new, more stable and well-functioning international system – “to initiate a new order of things” – have met with varying degrees of success historically. The Treaties of Westphalia that ended the Thirty Years War shattered any remaining pretensions of a unified *Res Publica Christiana* under the Papacy and Empire, and introduced the fundamental constitutive principles of the modern state system.¹ The Vienna Settlement of 1815 ended the Napoleonic Wars and in spite of (or because of) its conservative tenor, ushered in a century of repose and relative peace. On the other hand, the Versailles Settlement which sought to put an end to all wars, with states coexisting fraternally under the aegis of an international Covenant, proved to be no more than a “twenty year truce.” In the aftermath of the carnage of the Second World War, there was hope that a stable and progressive international system, based on self-determination, free

trade, collective security, and multilateral cooperation, centred around the new United Nations Organization, could yet be created.

This renewed attempt at creating a "Wilsonian" international order, however, foundered due to deteriorating post-war Soviet-American relations. The break-up of the wartime Grand Alliance, whose continued existence Franklin Roosevelt had deemed a *sine qua non* for the success of the post-war international order, resulted in some degree of disarray in American foreign policy. The problem, such as it was, was compounded further by the transfer of power - a result of Roosevelt's death in April 1945 even as victory was in sight - to a relatively inexperienced new president, Harry S. Truman.² Yet, as it turned out, it fell on Truman, the former haberdasher from Missouri whom Dean Acheson christened "the Captain with the mighty heart,"³ to guide and steer the United States through a period of strategic readjustment amidst an altered geopolitical environment.

When the war ended, the United States conveyed to the rest of the world "[an] image of ineffable superiority," possessing a preponderance of power and the new status of a superpower.⁴ There was a need, however, to orient American power to the post-war

¹ See Adam Watson, *The Evolution of International Society: A Comparative Historical Analysis* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), 170-82.

² See Harry S. Truman, *Memoirs*, 2 vols. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1955-1956), 1: 1-8.

³ Dean Acheson, dedication to *Present at the Creation: My Years in the State Department* (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 1969).

⁴ Paul M. Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000* (New York: Random House, 1987), 359.

The war had been "kind" to the United States. It was the only belligerent to emerge richer from the war. The American economy was operating at full employment levels, with wartime production finally removing the "slack" in the economy which the New Deal had been unable to eradicate. American GDP more than doubled during the course of the war, from \$88.6 billion in 1939 to \$220 billion in 1945. The same period also saw industrial expansion grow at the phenomenal rate of 15% per year, an increase of 50% in the size America's productive plant, and a similar increase in the physical output of goods. By the end of the war, the United States accounted for more than half of total world manufacturing output. It was also the world's largest exporter of goods, accounting for one-third of total world exports. American

international milieu and to re-evaluate the nation's strategic objectives and priorities as well as its security concerns. The war had demonstrated that the United States could no longer rely safely on George Washington's counsel that America's unique "detached and distant position" would enable it to "defy material injury from external annoyance."⁵ The United States' "splendid isolation" during the inter-war period had proved to be both chimerical and counter-productive. It was no longer possible to follow the dictum that Alfred Thayer Mahan prescribed for the United States in its conduct as a Great Power: in America, predominance; in Asia, cooperation; in Europe and Africa, abstention.⁶ The United States no longer stood to profit from Europe and Asia's distress – their distress was now its own.

In light of this, the United States would have to determine what level of military capacity would be required, what level of foreign commitment ought to be made, and what military and strategic doctrines ought to be adopted.⁷ These questions, although important to the formulation of American grand strategy in the post-war period, paled in

financial prowess was equally impressive: in 1945 the United States had in its possession two-thirds of the world's total gold supply and total world investment capital.

Economic pre-eminence conferred upon the United States unprecedented military power. The country had entered the war woefully unprepared, lagging behind the other belligerents militarily. By 1945, however, the American military had 12.5 million men and women in uniform, deployed and serving under American Supreme Commanders in the Asia-Pacific and Euro-Atlantic theatres. At sea, Britannia no longer ruled the waves: the US Navy with its 1200 major fighting vessels, organized around aircraft carriers rather than rapidly obsolescent battleships, eclipsed the Royal Navy. In the air, the American air force possessed preponderant strength – its massive fleets of long-range bombers constituted a truly 'strategic' force. If American preponderance in "conventional" weapons was an insufficient testament to the United States' military prowess, it could still fall back on its monopoly of atomic weapons. See James MacGregor Burns, *Roosevelt: Soldier of Freedom* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1970), 460; Kennedy, *Rise and Fall*, 357-58; and Melvyn P. Leffler, *A Preponderance of Power: National Security, the Truman Administration, and the Cold War* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), 2.

⁵ The Farewell Address, *GW*, 35: 145.

⁶ Samuel Flagg Bemis, *American Foreign Policy and the Blessings of Liberty, and Other Essays* (New Haven: Yale University Library, 1962), 7.

comparison, and were subordinate to, the normative and epistemological questions regarding post-war American policy, especially when it became clear that American power would have to be directed at containing the expansion of Soviet power. How would the United States go about the complex and onerous task of creating and maintaining the free half of the world that came under its “protection?” Could the United States avoid the pitfalls of moral hubris and the corrupting influence of power, and exercise the awesome power it had at its disposal in a responsible manner? What did the responsible exercise of power entail?

This paper focuses on the concept of “responsible power” as part of a study in ethics and statecraft. It applies and examines the concept of responsible power in the context of the Truman Doctrine, the Marshall Plan, and National Security Council Directive Number Sixty-eight (NSC 68). The Truman Doctrine represented the United States’ post-war “mission statement.” It banished the spectre of possible post-war American isolationism, committed the United States to the global containment of Soviet power and served as the lodestar for American Cold War policies. The Marshall Plan constituted America’s ambitious scheme to reconstitute and revitalize Western Europe, and safeguard the institutions of democratic governance, through the use of politico-economic means. The Truman Doctrine, the Marshall Plan, and the subsequent creation of the North Atlantic Alliance reversed two centuries of American statecraft, and did the hitherto unthinkable of binding the United States to the fate of Europe. It laid the foundation for the creation of an Atlantic Community of like-minded democratic states

⁷ Peter Trubowitz and Edward Rhodes, “Explaining American Strategic Adjustment,” in *The Politics of Strategic Adjustment*, eds. Peter Trubowitz, Emily Goldman, and Edward Rhodes (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 4.

that would in time prove to be the most productive international partnership of the twentieth century. NSC 68 was a direct result of the Truman Doctrine: it served to operationalize the latter during a period of intensified Soviet-American rivalry. As such, NSC 68 constituted a blueprint outlining the strategic *and* moral bases of the policy of containment.

The central thesis of this paper is that the United States, under the Truman Administration, attempted and succeeded to a large extent in exercising responsible power in the post-war period. However, the paper also maintains that the assessment of responsible power will satisfy neither the moral perfectionist nor the moral absolutist. It contends that the contingent nature of morality in international politics and statecraft, having to take into account “the brutalities of the earth,”⁸ means that moral judgments of political actions cannot be viewed as constituting some form of *deus ex machina*. Moral problems are never fully solved, and moral judgments are never rendered with any degree of finality; they are always subject to re-evaluation and reflection.

The core concerns that surround the concept of responsible power remain as salient today as they were in Truman’s time, as the United States attempts to adapt, and redefine its role as the only remaining superpower in the different world of the post Cold War era. Statesmen, policymakers, and academics have raised the issue of responsible power as part of the discourse on morality and international politics and statecraft; however, the concept remains very much ambiguous and amorphous.⁹ This paper

⁸ Theodore Roosevelt quoted in H. W. Brands, *What America Owes the World: The Struggle for the Soul of Foreign Policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 56.

⁹ For a realist treatment of the concept of responsible power, see Joel H. Rosenthal, *Righteous Realists: Political Realism, Responsible Power, and American Power in the Nuclear Age* (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1991).

attempts to make a modest contribution to the existing literature by establishing a framework within which to understand and evaluate critically the moral content of both the *theory* and *practice* of responsible power.

This paper adopts an interdisciplinary approach, engaging in inquiry at the intersection of political analysis, diplomatic history, and philosophical inquiry. It is grounded in the belief that there is value in a historically and philosophically informed understanding of international politics. It challenges the positivistic pretensions of neo-realism's "third image" analyses and the resulting *reductio ad absurdum*.¹⁰ There is more to the study of international politics than systems, structures, and correlations of material forces. The normative approach, crude and unsophisticated as it may seem to the "scientists" of international politics, returns the discipline and the social sciences to their humanistic roots. It allows for a focus on human agency and the notion that individuals are the conduits through which moral reasoning enters international politics. It is the individual who must face the great moral dilemmas that international politics invariably throws up, who must make hard decisions in the face of competing moral principles and claims with imperfect knowledge and unforeseen consequences. Statesmen, in the context of powerful economic and political forces they face, and the limits that such forces place on their actions, can make a difference.

Positivists, in their haste to consign normative inquiry to the "dust heap" of intellectual enterprise and to secure the ascendancy of their ever more elaborate "models" and "theories," have overlooked the point that no adequate understanding of international politics (and of politics in general) is possible without it. Viscount Morley of Blackburn

put it best: “Those who would treat politics and morality apart will never understand the one or the other.”¹¹

Chastened by Lord Morley’s admonishment, the next chapter begins with a section that examines whether international politics can or ought to be subject to moral inquiry and judgment. It also examines in turn the responsibility statesmen have toward their citizens and upholding national values and ideals, and the responsibility they have to the wider international community. The chapter concludes with an attempt to reconcile the two spheres of responsible power within a casuistic moral framework.

Chapter three looks at responsible power at a crucial period of American foreign relations that prefigures the debate of the Truman era – the founding of the American republic. America’s founding fathers, George Washington, Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and Thomas Jefferson in particular, were aware of the need to act responsibly and to balance duties both within and beyond the fledgling republic’s borders. The chapter is intended to highlight the practical difficulties associated with operationalizing the concept of responsible power, especially in the context of a founded nation like the United States. The chapter also serves to emphasize the point that what constitutes responsible power is not indelibly fixed for all time, and it can only be judged in the context of prevailing circumstances.

Chapter four applies the concept of responsible power to the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan. A section is devoted to placing the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan in the historical context of the time and the paper then proceeds to evaluate the two

¹⁰ See for example, Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1979).

¹¹ Quoted in Cathal J. Nolan, ed., *Ethics and Statecraft: The Moral Dimension of International Affairs* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1995), I.

initiatives in terms of responsible and prudential statecraft. Following this, chapter five looks at NSC 68 and concentrates on evaluating the chosen strategy of containing Soviet power and paying particular attention on the problem of responsible power and moral compromises. Chapter six concludes by tying the various strands of the paper together to demonstrate the validity of its central thesis.

CHAPTER 2

The Best Moral Choice Given the Circumstances: Moral Ambiguity and Moral Reasoning in International Politics

Every authentic tragedy is a shattering demonstration that moral life cannot be regulated like clockwork, and that even the purest striving for good can be forced into the most painful choices.

- Friedrich Meinecke, *Machiavellism*

It is far from impossible to reconcile, if we do not suffer ourselves to be entangled in the mazes of metaphysic sophistry, the use of both a fixed rule and an occasional deviation.

- Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*

I. Introduction

Are international politics a fit domain for moral reasoning? If so, how does one go about doing it and what criteria are to be used in the moral evaluation of the relations and conduct of states? From Thucydides onward, moral philosophers, students of international politics, statesmen, and policymakers have been preoccupied and very often troubled by the role of morality in international politics. There has often been a tendency, in the discourse on political morality and the ethical conduct of statecraft, to alternatively exaggerate or deprecate the influence of morality in international politics, and hence succumb to either self-righteous moralism or cynicism and scepticism.¹² This chapter will provide an overview of a way of conceptualizing international ethics that is broadly realist in outlook, but which is rooted in the casuistic tradition. Casuistic thinking has

¹² Hans J. Morgenthau, "The Twilight of International Morality," *Ethics* 58:2 (1948): 79; Kenneth W. Thompson, "The Limits of Principle in International Politics: Necessity and the New Balance of Power," *The Journal of Politics* 20:3 (1958): 437.

received bad press ever since Blaise Pascal's scathing attack in his *Les Lettres Provinciales*.¹³ As with most other things, however, there is "good" casuistry as well as "bad" casuistry, even though most contemporary writers on international ethics prefer to speak of "situational ethics," which is a latter-day concept "untainted" by Pascal's critique.¹⁴

The casuistic tradition is distinct from the Kantian rational-deductive approach, with its universal laws and principles. The rational-deductive tradition tends to make moral problems irresolvable since it makes no discrimination, no acknowledgement that claims, rights, and responsibilities have to be brought into balance.¹⁵ Casuistic thinking stresses the importance of cases and circumstances in the practical resolution of moral conundrums – much like the manner in which a lawyer sets about dealing with case histories or a physician diagnoses an illness.¹⁶ Political morality, in the casuistic tradition, requires that the moral agent possess an awareness of his circumstances, and the prudence and judgment to recognize which specific circumstances require which specific obligations or principles. Given the complexities of the international political sphere, no simple moral theory can be adequate. Thus, it is useful to remember, as Terry Nardin points out, "[e]thical traditions are traditions of argument, not uniform and unchanging doctrines."¹⁷ An effective theory of political morality must be able to take into account

¹³ Albert R. Jonsen and Stephen Toulmin, *The Abuse of Casuistry: A History of Moral Reasoning* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988), 231-49.

¹⁴ See Robert H. Jackson, "The Situational Ethics of Statecraft," in *Ethics and Statecraft: The Moral Dimension of International Affairs*, ed. Cathal J. Nolan (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1995), 21-35.

¹⁵ Cf. Thomas Donaldson, "Kant's Global Rationalism," in *Traditions of International Ethics*, eds. Terry Nardin and David R. Mapel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 136-57.

¹⁶ See Jonsen and Toulmin, *The Abuse of Casuistry*, 3-4.

¹⁷ Terry Nardin, "Ethical Traditions in International Affairs," in *Traditions of International Ethics*, 1.

intentions, means, ends, and consequences. This chapter will demonstrate that this is best done through a casuistic approach to political morality.

II. The Difficult Realm of International Politics

The task of moral reasoning about international politics is neither a simple nor an easy one. It is made more difficult when moralism is confused with morality. Moralism involves the adoption of a single value or principle and applying it indiscriminately without due regard to circumstances, time, or space. Moralism, as Ernest Lefever indicates, is “a sham morality, a partial ethic... expressed in self-righteous rhetoric or manipulative symbols designed to justify, enlist, condemn, or deceive rather than inform, inspire, or serve the cause of justice.”¹⁸ Morality, on the other hand, is the endless search for what is right in the midst of sometimes competing, sometimes conflicting, and sometimes incompatible values and principles. According to Lefever, “morality is a synonym for responsibility and moralism is a conscious or unconscious escape from accountability.”¹⁹ Kenneth Thompson has noted, with some degree of exasperation, that people “are offended to know that principles and necessity are frequently in conflict when man acts politically. They are distressed to learn that it is the essence of politics that man chooses goals and objectives which are limited both in application and in scope and therefore fully satisfying only for particular groups and nations.”²⁰ This tendency toward moralism is not completely surprising given that both the “language” and the “structure” of moral theory emphasizes universality and impartiality among individuals –

¹⁸ Ernest W. Lefever, “Morality versus Moralism,” in *Ethics and World Politics: Four Perspectives*, ed. Ernest W. Lefever (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972), 5.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.

it is the injunction of the Sermon of the Mount: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."²¹

The actual transposition of the Sermon of the Mount to the realm of international politics has not been achieved – a fact bemoaned by moralists. Moral reasoning in the domestic realm is not the same as it is in the international realm. The wholesale transposition of simple personal moral maxims to the realm of international politics is naïve at best, and dangerous at worst. Moral philosophers acknowledge the logical possibility of a completely amoral egoistic existence, but believe that it is extremely difficult for individuals to practice.²² Individuals practice their daily moral habits within the confines of the sovereign state. It provides individuals with the requisite amount of relative peace and stability, thereby allowing them to pursue their moral intentions. However, the very presence of sovereign states also serves to throw individuals' moral intuition into disarray when it comes to international politics. International politics are conducted at the level of individuals organized into collective entities called states, and if a totally amoral existence is virtually impossible for individuals, it does not appear to be the case with states.²³

Nearly four centuries ago, Thomas Hobbes observed that individuals, having escaped the state of nature existing among them and having organized themselves into the relative safety of the state, would rather tolerate the state of nature existing among

²⁰ Thompson, "The Limits of Principle," 437.

²¹ Joseph Nye, Jr., *Ethics and Foreign Policy* (Wye Plantation, MD: Aspen Institute for Humanistic Studies, 1985), 1.

²² See R. M. Hare, *Moral Thinking: Its Levels, Methods, and Point* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), chap. 10; and J. L. Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1977), 192.

states rather than submit to a supreme international authority.²⁴ Reinhold Niebuhr too, was sceptical of the possibility of collective virtue, believing that there existed a distinction between the moral and social behaviour of individuals and that of social groups - a distinction between "moral man" and "immoral society." Niebuhr maintains that while it is possible for individuals to engage in moral behaviour and demonstrate empathy for others, it is more problematic when attempting to deal with social groups. Individuals, frustrated in their search for security and power, channel their energies toward the state in order to seek "fulfilment," thereby projecting their individual quest for security and power on to a collective plane. In the case of states, as with social groups, "there is less reason to guide and check impulses, less capacity for self-transcendence, less ability to comprehend the needs of others and therefore more unrestrained egoism than individuals, who comprise the group, reveal in their personal relations."²⁵

For Niebuhr, the ameliorating and restraining power that love exerts on human relations at the level of the family and friendship is completely absent in the realm of politics. For "love, which depends upon emotion... is baffled by the more intricate social relations in which the highest ethical attitudes are achieved only by careful calculation. If love cannot find an immediate object, it has difficulties in expressing itself."²⁶ Political action in the international realm may be prompted by good Christian motives, but it cannot overcome the moral ambiguities caused by the constant quest for power and security. For Niebuhr, the political realm is not one of absolutes, and political morality is

²³ See Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society: A Study in Ethics and Politics* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, [1932] 1960).

²⁴ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. C. B. MacPherson (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, [1651] 1968), chap. 13.

²⁵ Niebuhr, *Moral Man*, ix.

ambiguous because it must admit considerations of both self-interest and power.²⁷ In the absence of love or altruism, only a balancing of power with power can bring about a semblance of harmony to the international realm. However, even as Niebuhr laments the fact that the “children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light,” he maintains that it would be wrong to view the realities of political life in either purely sentimental or wholly cynical terms.²⁸ For Niebuhr, a genuine political morality must “do justice to the insights of both the realists and the idealists” – it must reconcile man’s residual capacity for justice with his self-seeking nature.²⁹

Arnold Wolfers has noted “[b]ehaviour that would be considered immoral by any standard can obviously be detected in all realms of life; but nowhere does the contradiction between the professed ethical principles and actual behaviour appear so patent and universal as in the conduct of foreign relations.”³⁰ Stephen Krasner, however, considers the discrepancy between the professed principles of statesmen and states and their actual actions to be an inherent feature of international politics. For Krasner, international politics are characterized by “organized hypocrisy.”³¹ He indicates, with hardly any degree of surprise, that there is a disjunction between the theory and practice of international politics. The supposed norms and principles governing the relations among states – sovereignty, both in its Westphalian and international legal variants have

²⁶ Ibid., 74.

²⁷ Reinhold Niebuhr, “Foreign Policy and Moral Problems,” in *Reinhold Niebuhr on Politics: His Political Philosophy and Its Application to Our Age as Expressed in His Writings*, eds. Harry R. Davis and Robert C. Good (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1960), 328.

²⁸ Reinhold Niebuhr, “Children of Light and Children of Darkness,” in *The Essential Reinhold Niebuhr: Selected Essays and Addresses*, ed. Robert McAfee Brown (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1986), 166.

²⁹ Reinhold Niebuhr, “The Christian in Politics,” in *Reinhold Niebuhr on Politics*, 196.

³⁰ Arnold Wolfers, “Statesmanship and Moral Choice,” in *Discord and Collaboration: Essays on International Politics* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1962), 47.

never been either absolute or transcendent. In the “anarchic” realm of international politics where there is an absence of an overarching authority capable of creating and enforcing rules and norms effectively, it falls on states to create rules and norms for themselves and to see to it that they are enforced. Under such circumstances, there has been little incentive for states not to deviate from the rules and norms of sovereignty when it suits their interests.³² States have either adhered to or violated the norms and principles of sovereignty according to the dictates of their interest:

Outcomes in the international system are determined by rulers whose violation of, or adherence to, international principles or rules is based on calculations of material and ideational interests, not taken-for-granted practices derived from some overarching institutional structure or deeply embedded generative grammars.³³

The international realm is “anarchic” insofar that there is an absence of an effective centralized authority, but this does not make it, as realists have tended to argue, a Hobbesian state of nature.³⁴ Hobbes argued that the state of nature existing among states differed qualitatively from that among individuals.³⁵ Thus, even in the anarchic realm of international politics, the life of a state is *not* “solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short.” Indeed, as Kal Holsti points out, “unlike economic markets, where firms are constantly the object of successful predation or bankruptcy, states have an impressive

³¹ Stephen D. Krasner, *Sovereignty: Organized Hypocrisy* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1999), 9.

³² *Ibid.*, 24.

³³ *Ibid.*, 9.

³⁴ See Charles R. Beitz, *Political Theory and International Relations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 15ff; and Marshall Cohen, “Moral Skepticism and International Relations,” *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 13:4 (1984): 318ff.

³⁵ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chap. 13.

record of survival and endurance.”³⁶ Hedley Bull and others following him have argued that the international realm, even though it is anarchic, is not one of pure self-help.³⁷ States develop norms, principles, and institutions to regulate relations among themselves, with these taking the form of international law, custom, conventions on diplomatic practice, the balance of power, and the “institution” of war.

The “society of states” as it exists, is not a perfect one. It is, as Krasner maintains, characterized by “organized hypocrisy.” The anarchic nature of the international realm, the longevity and persistence of the doctrine of *raison d'état*, and the relative weakness of international institutions makes moral reasoning about international politics a difficult task. Yet in spite of these caveats, international politics is not characterized by unmitigated self-help; “necessity” is not always the supreme political value for states, and the strong do not always do what they can and the weak do not always suffer what they must. We still ought to remain cautious not to overestimate the role and power of morality in the relations and conduct of states, just as we need to be wary of the potential consequences of any moral crusade, however well-intentioned it might be. Moral reasoning about international politics is different from that of domestic politics or personal relations. The realists’ faulty analogy of the state with the individual in the Hobbesian state of nature also means that a simple transposition of personal moral maxims on to states is equally at fault, and can have serious consequences. Moral

³⁶ K. J. Holsti, “Governance Without Government: Polyarchy in Nineteenth-Century European International Politics,” in *Governance Without Government: Order and Change in World Politics*, eds. James N. Rosenau and Ernst-Otto Czempiel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 31.

³⁷ See Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics* (London: MacMillan, 1977); Adam Watson, *The Evolution of International Society*; Ian Clark, *The Hierarchy of States: Reform and Resistance in the International Order* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Alexander

reasoning about international politics is difficult, but not impossible. It requires caution and prudence – a healthy dose of “realism,” not scepticism or cynicism.³⁸

The total sceptic or cynic who argues that there is no role for morality in international politics merely smuggles his own preferred values into the discourse: “When faced with moral choices, to pretend not to choose is merely a disguised form of choice.”³⁹ Appeals to the doctrine of *raison d'état* or necessity of state require closer scrutiny. Situations of *absolute* necessity are rare in the daily relations of states; instances where it is a matter of “do or die” are the exception rather than the rule in international politics. Few states are confronted with acute security situations or dilemmas on a daily basis. Clearly these conditions are loosened somewhat in times of war, but even then there remains the limitations placed on military necessity by the doctrines of *ius ad bellum* and *ius in bello*.⁴⁰ Arnold Wolfers indicates that arguments based on the doctrine of necessity of state do not place political actions beyond the realm of moral judgment – they rest on moral decisions themselves.⁴¹ Much of international politics allows for choices regarding the definition of indefinite concepts such as “national interest,” “security,” and “survival.” They are neither abstract nor objective concepts – they are given meaning and force through the preferences, choices, and actions of statesmen. It is both misleading and false for statesmen to claim that they “had no choice.” Moral choice is possible for the simple reason that choices are almost always present, even if the

Wendt, “Anarchy is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics,” *International Organization* 46:2 (1992): 391-425; and Holsti, “Governance Without Government,” 30-57.

³⁸ Martin Wight, *International Theory: The Three Traditions*, eds. Gabriele Wight and Brian Porter (New York: Hulans and Meier, 1992), 241.

³⁹ Nye, *Ethics and Foreign Policy*, 2.

⁴⁰ See Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument with Historical Illustrations* (New York: Basic Books, 1977).

statesman must make a choice between several unpalatable ones. He has the freedom, within the confines of the circumstances in which he finds himself, to choose which ends to pursue and the means to be used in their pursuit. The very presence of choices means that a statesman's decisions are subject to ethical and moral judgment. As Joseph Nye puts it, "no domain of human activity can be categorized *a priori* as amoral when choices exist."⁴² The difficult realm of international politics within which the statesman must operate renders his task of moral reasoning difficult. In no way, however, does it absolve him from the responsibility of moral reasoning and ethical judgment.

III. Understanding and Judging Moral Arguments

Moral theory *per se* in the hands of philosophers becomes an exercise in placing "the precepts of received morality into some sort of consistent order... [and to] interpret morality as a system of general principles and to try to discover a rational foundation for this system."⁴³ As such, philosophers are concerned primarily with the *general* rather than the *particular*: more interested in the search for general moral principles rather than a study of how such principles are applied in particular cases. This "universalistic" tendency is given expression in Immanuel Kant's categorical imperative: "Act only according to that maxim by which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law."⁴⁴

⁴¹ Wolfers, "Statesmanship and Moral Choice," 58.

⁴² Nye, *Ethics and Foreign Policy*, 2.

⁴³ Nardin, "Ethical Traditions," 1.

⁴⁴ Immanuel Kant, *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Lewis White Beck (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, [1785] 1959), §2.

In the ethereal realm of pure thought and reason, the gulf that separates the “is” from the “ought” can be made to disappear, and policies and actions can be conceptualized as being motivated by uncorrupted notions of duty and justice. Unfortunately, statesmen and policymakers do not have the luxury of inhabiting and working in the realm of philosophers, where issues are painted in stark contrasts of blacks and whites and are clearly labelled “acceptable” or “unacceptable.”⁴⁵ As moral agents, theirs is a “twilight” world consisting of shades of grey, where moral principles as they exist are neither self-interpreting nor self-executing. They are translated into actual policies only through the mediation of human agency. In the political realm, moral principles do not exist in a vacuum – they are realized only in the specific acts that individuals choose to carry out. When the statesman acts under conditions of imperfect knowledge – under “a veil of ignorance” as it were – it has a more profound meaning and carries with it graver consequences than a mere philosophical thought exercise. The task is made no easier when the particular cases that the statesman *qua* moral agent must attempt to comprehend and resolve are, on the one hand, unique, but on the other hand, also appear to be similar, since they are products of general social and political forces.

“Politics,” argues Reinhold Niebuhr, “will, to the end of history, be an area where conscience and power meet, where ethical and coercive factors of human life interpenetrate and work out their tentative and uneasy compromises.”⁴⁶ The moral intuitions of ordinary individuals, and those of statesmen, do not constitute “a

⁴⁵ Marc Trachtenberg, “Strategists, Philosophers, and the Nuclear Question,” in *Nuclear Deterrence: Ethics and Strategy*, eds. Russell Hardin, John Mearsheimer, Gerald Dworkin, and Robert Goodin (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press. 1963), 356.

⁴⁶ Niebuhr, *Moral Man*, 4.

harmonious system of compatible claims.” Conflicts of moral claims are completely natural to individuals, as Stuart Hampshire indicates:

It seems an unavoidable feature of moral existence that men should be torn between moral claims entailed by effectiveness in action, and particularly in politics, and the moral claims derived from the ideals of scrupulous honesty and integrity... Such disjunctions as these, and the contrary moral claims associated with them, generate the more difficult moral problems, because morality appears in our experience as a conflict of claims and a division of purpose.⁴⁷

There is a need to think systematically about ethics and the practice of statecraft. Moral reasoning about international politics must be able to weather charges of vagueness, hypocrisy, or being mere expressions of taste.⁴⁸ However, moral reasoning about international politics and statecraft is not an abstract thought exercise about contending moral paradigms. It is in essence an exercise in practical morality, having to take into account the “conflict of claims and [the] division of purpose.” as well as “uneasy compromises.” As such, moral reasoning is not about a one-dimensional focus on ultimate ends; it also looks to means, ends, consequences, and the attempt to balance competing moral claims. Thinking ethically about international politics and statecraft means that we must shift constantly between the general and the particular. We require access to general moral principles in order to make logically valid conclusions regarding the proper course of action. At the same time, we must also recognize that general principles are not immutable – they have to be revised in the light of the circumstances in

⁴⁷ Stuart Hampshire, *Morality and Conflict* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983), 117.

⁴⁸ Nye, *Ethics and Foreign Policy*, 5; David A. Welch, “Can We Think Systematically About Ethics and Statecraft?” *Ethics and International Affairs* 8 (1994): 24.

which they are to be applied. As Terry Nardin indicates, ethics “involves principles but it also involves interpretation, choice, and action.”⁴⁹

IV. Reconciling Political Morality

International politics is not the realm of transcendence, but rather that of contingency and approximation, and to those seeking a nuanced understanding of moral reasoning in international politics and the ethical practice of statecraft, the choice is not between morality and immorality but between moral perfectionism and non-perfectionism. Hans Morgenthau has indicated that the choices one faces in international politics are “not between moral principles and the national interest devoid of moral dignity, but between one set of moral principles divorced from political reality and another set derived from political reality.”⁵⁰ Contrary to a widespread misunderstanding of his position on power politics, Morgenthau did *not* advocate the amoral pursuit of power, or power for power’s sake.⁵¹ Power, Morgenthau argues, while constituting a vital element in the assessment of the national interest, ought not to be worshipped blindly. He points out that “in the long run philosophies and political systems that have made the lust and struggle for power their mainstays have proved impotent and destructive.”⁵² Thus, power while indispensable to successful political action, is always subject to limits: superior power confers no right, either legal or moral, to do with that power all that it is

⁴⁹ Nardin, “Ethical Traditions,” 3.

⁵⁰ Hans J. Morgenthau, *In Defense of the National Interest* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1951), 33.

⁵¹ Cf. Cohen, “Moral Skepticism.”

⁵² Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, 6th ed. rev. Kenneth W. Thompson (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1985), 244.

capable of. Morgenthau points out that it is the moral aspect of man's nature that prevents power and political action from being divorced from ethical considerations.⁵³

Morality limits the choice of ends and means available to the statesman, and delineates the legitimate sphere of a particular action. This is important for Morgenthau since political actors tend to overstep the bounds of both morality and prudence.⁵⁴ Morgenthau, like Niebuhr and Max Weber, was fully aware of the "moral significance of political action... [and] the ineluctable tension between the moral command and the requirements of successful political action," and like them he refused to gloss-over the tension between politics and morality, and the paradoxical nature of political morality.⁵⁵

Indeed, it is Weber who identifies the "paradox" that lies at the heart of political morality – that there is no necessary ethical correspondence between means and ends in political action, that they are not always in accord with, or justify one another. Politics, Weber points out, deals with the world as it *is* – wherein force and violence constitute "the decisive means for political action"⁵⁶ Ethics, on the other hand, deals with the world as it *ought* to be – "it is the Sermon of the Mount; an acosmic ethic of ultimate ends."⁵⁷ Thus, Weber understood that the pursuit of political success could be at odds with the pursuit of an ethical good since it creates a tension between means and ends:

No ethics in the world can dodge the fact that in numerous instances the attainment of 'good' ends is bound up to the fact that one must be willing to pay the price of using

⁵³ Hans J. Morgenthau, *Scientific Man Versus Power Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1946), 177.

⁵⁴ Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics in the Twentieth Century*, 3 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), 1: 325.

⁵⁵ Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, 12.

⁵⁶ Max Weber, "Politics as a Vocation," in *From Max Weber*, eds. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), 121.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 124.

morally dubious means or at least dangerous ones – and facing the possibility or even probability of evil ramifications.⁵⁸

At the heart of this paradox lies Weber's juxtaposition of an "ethic of ultimate ends" and an "ethic of responsibility." Weber points out that "there is an abysmal contrast between conduct that follows the maxim of an ethic of ultimate ends – that is in religious terms, 'The Christian does rightly and leaves the results with the Lord' – and conduct that follows the ethic of responsibility, in which case one has to give an account of the foreseeable results on one's actions."⁵⁹

The ethic of ultimate ends comes close to approximating the Kantian or deontological approach, which stresses that the presence of rules and right motives is a sufficient criterion for judging the morality of actions. Good motives, however, as Morgenthau points out, "gives assurance against deliberately bad policies; they do not guarantee the moral goodness and political success of the policies they inspire."⁶⁰ The ethic of ultimate ends engenders in its adherents a conviction that devotion to the "cause" and the realization of its ends must be pursued unconditionally – *fiat iustitia pereat mundus*. Herein lies Weber's fear of the chiliastic prophet or the fanatic revolutionary – one who sacrifices means, consequences, and a sense of responsibility and proportion on the altar of the all-powerful, all-consuming cause. The ethic of ultimate ends is also the credo for Martin Wight's "Revolutionist." As he points out, the true Revolutionist recognizes no paradox in political morality – he sacrifices "himself and his private ethics for the cause, so there is no tension or dichotomy between private life and political aims.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 121.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 120.

⁶⁰ Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, 16.

The political sphere swallows up the private.”⁶¹ Here, it is the Revolutionist, the chiliastic prophet, and the fanatic revolutionary, not the so-called “Machiavellian” realist who obliterates the distinction between means and ends, and who asserts “the literal meaning of the principle, that the end justifies, and sanctions, the means.”⁶²

The ethic of ultimate ends is also the credo of the moral perfectionist. For the moral perfectionist, it is manifestly not true that the “genius or demon of politics lives in tension with the god of love, as well as the Christian God.”⁶³ There is neither tension nor conflict: the Sermon of the Mount lays down absolute rules of right conduct that brook no exceptions. The moral perfectionist thus rejects any claim that circumstances can or must play a role in moral reasoning. What is deemed immoral or evil under a given set of circumstances cannot possibly be justified under another.⁶⁴ Moral perfectionism renders statecraft impotent since under no circumstances can a statesman resort to violence or other “morally dangerous” means, even *in extremis*. It is thus not for nothing that Bismarck warned that “you cannot govern with the Sermon of the Mount.”⁶⁵

Moral perfectionism and the ethic of ultimate ends founder on the problem of justification of means by ends, since they cannot contend with the ethical irrationality of the world.⁶⁶ Under such circumstances, the moral perfectionist can tender no advice to the statesman other than to forego politics itself.⁶⁷ This, according to Wight, is “quietism,” an extreme form of moral perfectionism that afflicts the “Inverted

⁶¹ Wight, *International Theory*, 252.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 254.

⁶³ Weber, “Politics as a Vocation,” 126.

⁶⁴ Wolfers, “Statesmanship and Moral Choice,” 49-50.

⁶⁵ Otto von Bismarck quoted in Wight, *International Theory*, 254.

⁶⁶ Weber, “Politics as a Vocation,” 122.

⁶⁷ Wolfers, “Statesmanship and Moral Choice,” 50.

Revolutionist” who repudiates all politics and withdraws completely into the sphere of private ethics.⁶⁸ Melodrama is being played out here – the moral perfectionist turns his back on politics while maintaining the dignity and integrity of his personal virtue and values since he has not compromised with evil. But the questions remain: at what cost, and for what exactly? For beneath the veneer of virtue lies a degree of foolish pride and senseless martyrdom. It is beyond the comprehension of the moral perfectionist that there is no ethical correspondence between personal moral virtue and the refusal to partake of evil, as Hans Morgenthau explains:

By avoiding a political action because it is unjust, the perfectionist does nothing but exchange blindly one injustice for another which might even be worse than the former. He shrinks from the lesser evil because he does not want to do evil at all. Yet his personal abstention from evil, which is actually a subtle form of egotism with a good conscience, does not at all affect the existence of evil in this world but only destroys the faculty for discriminating between different evils. The perfectionist thus becomes finally a greater source of evil.⁶⁹

Moral choice would be far simpler if the statesman could select a single value as his guiding principle, and relegate the rest to a secondary or instrumental role. This can be done, however, only at the price of shallow moralism. Political life, contrary to the claims of the moral perfectionist, is governed by more than one principle, which means that principles invariably come into conflict and choices have to be made between them. There is tension here between the demon of politics and the god of love, and the statesman is suspended in the antinomy between the desirable and the attainable. From the perspective of the non-perfectionist, individuals – private citizens and statesmen alike

⁶⁸ Wight, *International Theory*, 256.

have to choose from the options available to them the one that given the circumstances is attainable and the one likely to produce the least deleterious effect.⁷⁰ This is what Morgenthau meant by a morality derived from political reality. In the contingent realm of international politics, compromise is an inherent correlate of political action. The statesman, as Wight indicates, must make compromises with the circumstances in which he has to act, and more often than not those circumstances are less than ideal.⁷¹

The statesman cannot help but adapt to the circumstances that he has to face, indeed it is the hallmark of adroit and ethical statecraft to be able to assess the political environment and to try to do the best given the circumstances. That, as Edmund Burke points out, is what separates the theorist from the true statesman:

A statesman differs from a professor in a university; the latter has only the general view of society; the former, the statesman, has a number of circumstances to combine with those general views. Circumstances are infinite, and infinitely combined; they are variable and transient; he who does not take them into account is not erroneous, but stark mad... metaphysically mad. A statesman never losing sight of principles, is to be guided by circumstances; and judging contrary to the exigencies of the moment, he may ruin his country forever.⁷²

For the non-perfectionist, the statesman's compromise with the circumstances that he faces means that there is a great likelihood that he will have to contract with "diabolical powers."⁷³ There can be no avoiding the paradox of political morality, that those who would seek to do good must sometimes act badly and "be willing to pay the price of

⁶⁹ Morgenthau, *Scientific Man*, 202.

⁷⁰ See Wolfers, "Statesmanship and Moral Choice," 51; and Wight, *International Theory*, 243.

⁷¹ Wight, *International Theory*, 243.

⁷² Edmund Burke quoted in Alberto R. Coll, "Normative Prudence as a Tradition of Statecraft," in *Ethics and International Affairs: A Reader*, ed. Joel H. Rosenthal (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1995), 69.

using morally dubious means or at least dangerous mean ones" in order that morally effective political action can take place.⁷⁴ Political morality must condemn the evils of power, but it must also reconcile itself to the ubiquity of "evil" in all political action. For unlike the moral perfectionist, the non-perfectionist recognizes that "it is not true that good can follow only from good and evil from evil, but that often the opposite is true."⁷⁵ This is not the doctrine of justification of means by ends, nor is it a license to commit evil, for Weber demands that those who would practice morally-sound statecraft, in contradistinction to the chiliastic prophet or the fanatic revolutionary, take responsibility for the foreseeable consequences of their actions. For those who would follow Weber's ethic of responsibility, the injunction is not "do no harm," but rather "attempt to do the least harm."⁷⁶ The acknowledgement of, and the willingness to follow through on the doctrine of the lesser evil is, as Edmund Burke argues, an intrinsic part of sound and responsible statecraft:

It is no inconsiderable part of wisdom, to know how much of an evil ought to be tolerated; lest, by attempting a degree of purity impracticable in degenerate times and manners, instead of casting off the subsisting ill practices, new corruptions might be produced for the concealment and security of the old.⁷⁷

"Ethics in the abstract," argues Hans Morgenthau, "judges actions by its conformity with the moral law; political ethics judges actions by its political

⁷³ Weber, "Politics as a Vocation," 123.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 121; see also Peter Johnson, *Politics, Innocence, and the Limits of Goodness* (London and New York: Routledge, 1988), 69; and Morgenthau, *Scientific Man*, 202-03.

⁷⁵ Weber, "Politics as a Vocation," 123.

⁷⁶ See Wolfers, "Statesmanship and Moral Choice," 51n; and idem, "Political Theory and International Relations," in *Discord and Collaboration*, 245.

⁷⁷ Edmund Burke quoted in Wight, *International Theory*, 243.

consequences.”⁷⁸ However, the statesman must not simply judge political actions on the basis of their consequences. He must also take responsibility for them as Weber demands, and must also be cognizant and wary of a too simplistic application of consequentialism. The statesman must attempt to do the best he can given the circumstances, and this requires approximation and compromise as well as a willingness to commit the lesser evil if need be. With the non-perfectionist morality, there is always a possibility given human proclivities, to engage in shallow moral reasoning that makes a travesty of moral reasoning and ethical judgment. With non-perfectionism there is no way of determining *a priori* which ends should justify which means under which circumstances. The doctrine of the lesser evil can be also problematic as Martin Wight warns, since it does not “carry within itself the test of its own applicability.”⁷⁹ If there are no proper means of “verification” in politics, how can we be sure that the statesman actually chooses the lesser evil? Furthermore, is there not the possibility that a “Gresham’s Law” of bad moral choices might develop, thereby driving out the possibility of good choices?⁸⁰

Political morality involves compromise – with circumstances and the presence of evil – as well as risk, since there can be no precise formula to solve the moral dilemmas in international politics. Those who would seek moral tidiness will not find it in the casuistic approach to moral reasoning. There are no grand or overarching principles that are presented as solutions to complex moral problems. The non-perfectionist political morality demands that the statesman exercise political and ethical *judgment* – to evaluate the ends, means, and consequences of political action in the light of prevailing

⁷⁸ Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, 12.

⁷⁹ Wight, *International Theory*, 244.

⁸⁰ Nye, *Ethics and Foreign Policy*, 6.

circumstances, to make difficult moral choices, and to act. It is an exacting task for the statesman to act with moral discrimination – to think critically and reflectively about the choices available to him, and to act in a responsible manner without the benefit of absolute moral certainty. To render ethical judgment is, as Ronald Beiner argues, to “bear a tragic burden.”⁸¹ The statesman must deal with imponderables and contingencies while still rendering ethical judgment and acting, in the knowledge that the principles of political morality are “disquietingly protean” and that he can never fully master all the possibilities and render a definitive solution.⁸²

With the non-perfectionist political morality, it is not true that personal virtues have no role to play in moral reasoning and the ethical judgment of international politics. What needs to be abandoned, however, is the simplistic notion that all that is required of political morality is a “good” man with “good” intentions. The exercise of responsible and morally sound statecraft requires that the statesman possesses strength of character – virtues that include, but are not merely limited to, prudence. These virtues must also include compassion, courage, empathy, humility, a sense of justice, resolve, and a sense of proportion. These virtues are necessary to sustain the statesman through the “strong and slow boring of hard boards” that is international politics, and to prevent him from succumbing to despair and taking “mystic flight from reality.”⁸³

Moral reasoning and the ethical judgment of international politics are neither simple nor certain, and they are ill suited to scientific systematization. If statesmen find it difficult to make hard moral choices and resolve moral dilemmas, our task of

⁸¹ Ronald Beiner, *Political Judgment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 118.

⁸² Wight, *International Theory*, 244; Beiner, *Political Judgment*, 118.

⁸³ Weber. “Politics as a Vocation.” 128.

understanding those choices and rendering judgment upon them is similarly difficult. As this paper turns in subsequent chapters to the analysis of the Truman Administration and its exercise of responsible power, it is useful to remember that the process of ethical judgment is not “a process of scientific analysis.” It is, as Martin Wight points out, a process that is “more akin to literary criticism,” which demands “a sensitive awareness of the intractability of all political situations, and the moral quandary in which statecraft operates.”⁸⁴

⁸⁴ Wight, *International Theory*, 254.

CHAPTER 3

Duties Within and Beyond Borders: Ideals, Self-Interests, and

Responsible Power in American Foreign Policy

It had been said that respectability in the eyes of foreign Nations was not the object at which we aimed; that the proper object of republican government was domestic tranquility and happiness. That was an ideal distinction. No Government could give us tranquility and happiness at home, which did not possess sufficient stability and strength to make us respectable abroad.

- Alexander Hamilton

If we be free and happy at home, we shall be respectable abroad.

- James Madison

I. Introduction

Having looked briefly at the role of morality in international politics and the ethical conduct of statecraft at a theoretical level, this chapter will address the question of how moral considerations pertain to the conduct of American foreign policy and the responsible exercise of power. For better or worse, Americans do not conceive of foreign policy as possessing merely an instrumental value. The conduct of American foreign policy and statecraft is *not*, as Walter Lippmann argued, simply a matter of “bringing into balance, with a comfortable surplus of power in reserve, the nation’s commitments and the nation’s power.”⁸⁵ Lippmann is not incorrect, however: like any other nation, the United States has to strike a balance between its commitments and the resources that it

⁸⁵ Walter Lippmann, *U.S. Foreign Policy: Shield of the Republic* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1943), 5.

has at its disposal.⁸⁶ The United States, however, more than any other nation, is especially sensitive to the normative element in foreign policy. From this perspective, American foreign policy is not merely the expression and pursuit of the nation's self-interests. It is also the embodiment of the nation's ideals and aspirations – an expression of what the United States *is* and what it *would like to be*. Thus, American foreign policy serves to define both the United States' domestic political order as well as its place in the world. Could we, however, expect or accept anything less from a nation "conceived in liberty" and dedicated to the propositions contained in the *Declaration of Independence* and the preamble to the Constitution?⁸⁷

Clearly in practical terms the gulf that separates the "is" from the "ought" cannot be breached completely, with the result that American foreign policy is fraught with tension: it is often suspended between the pursuit of interests – the achievement of "stability and strength" – and the realization of ideals – the securing of "freedom and happiness" at home.⁸⁸ The main source of such tensions lies in the competing communitarian and cosmopolitan visions of America's responsibilities to itself and the wider international community. The central thesis of this chapter is that an understanding of responsible power is to be found in the interplay between the communitarian and cosmopolitan impulses that lie at the heart of American foreign policy and the

⁸⁶ See Kennedy, *Rise and Fall*, 514ff.

⁸⁷ America's "mission statement" is embodied in the *Declaration of Independence*, "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness;" and the preamble to the Constitution, "to form a more perfect Union, to establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty for ourselves and our Posterity."

⁸⁸ Alexander Hamilton in *The Records of the Federal Convention of 1787*, 4 vols. ed. Max Farrand (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1966), 1: 466-67; James Madison quoted in Walter LaFeber, "The Constitution and United States Foreign Policy: An Interpretation," *The Journal of American History* 74:3 (1987): 698.

reconciliation of what the United States owes to its citizens and its ideals with what it owes to others – between its duties *within* and *beyond* its borders.

II. Novus Ordo Seclorum: America as Noble Experiment and Redeemer Nation

America, unlike other nations, is no mere “geographical expression;” it was conceived as an “idea” and an “experiment.” America as an idea stands in contradistinction to, and as a repudiation of, the Old World: where the Old World represented war, poverty, and oppression, America held out the promise of peace, prosperity, and liberty. The notion of idea and experiment met in the belief that the new nation would and could prove to the world that a freedom-loving people were capable of governing themselves effectively, thereby demonstrating the possibilities of human liberty. The fledgling republic, in the words of Alexander Hamilton, would “decide the important question, whether societies of men are capable or not of establishing good government from reflection and choice, or whether they are forever destined to depend for their political constitutions on accident and force.”⁸⁹ As such, America would be a “trailblazer” leading the way for the rest of the world. America would be, as John Winthrop proclaimed, “as a Citty upon a Hill,” for all the world to see. However, the American republic was also an unprecedented political experiment, which carried with it the ever-present risk of failure. Even as Winthrop proclaimed America to be “a Citty upon a Hill,” he also warned his followers that “the eis of all people are uppon us; soe if wee shall deal falsely with our god in this worke wee have undertaken and soe cause him

⁸⁹ Alexander Hamilton. *FP*: 1.

to withdraw his present help from us, wee shall be made a story and a by-word through the world.”⁹⁰

The Founding Fathers too faced the possibility that the new expanded republic of the United States would become “a story and a by-word through the world.” They were not, however, so much concerned with a withdrawal of divine favour from the American experiment as they were with the “inescapability” of history. The Founding Fathers were astute students of history, and history appeared to be against the American experiment. No similar modern republic had ever extended over such a huge extent of territory, while the classical republicanism of Greece and Rome served to both inspire and haunt them. Could the United States hope to avoid the fate of Athens, Rome, Florence, and Venice? As Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., points out, the Founding Fathers “had no illusions about the inviolability of America to history, supposing that all states, including the American, immediate to history, as a consistent Calvinist should have supposed all states immediate to God.”⁹¹

If the Founding Fathers had any illusions, they were swiftly dispelled as they confronted what J. G. A. Pocock terms the “Machiavellian moment” – the moment when a republic confronts and contemplates its “own temporal finitude, attempting to remain morally and politically stable in a stream of irrational events conceived as essentially destructive of all systems of secular stability.”⁹² Confronting the Machiavellian moment did little to ease the doubts of the Founding Fathers. At the conclusion of the

⁹⁰ John Winthrop quoted in Arthur A. Ekirch, *Ideas, Ideals, and American Diplomacy: A History of Their Growth and Interaction* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1966), 22.

⁹¹ Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Cycles of American History* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1986), 9.

⁹² J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), viii.

Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia, a person no less than George Washington continued to entertain doubts whether the American republic could survive for two decades. Hamilton, ever the realist, warned against excessive or premature optimism regarding the American experiment:

Have we not already seen enough of the fallacy and extravagance of these idle theories which have assured us with promises of an exception from the imperfections, the weaknesses, and evils incident to society in every shape? Is it not time to awake from the deceitful dream of a golden age and to adopt as a practical maxim for the direction of our political conduct that we, as well as the other inhabitants of the globe, are yet remote from the happy empire of perfect wisdom and perfect virtue?⁹³

Overcoming the Machiavellian moment meant that the American ship of state would have to sail against the tide of history. If the great experiment was to have any chance of success, the “direction” of American “political conduct” would have to turn inward: to consolidate the gains of independence, ensure the proper working of the political institutions under the new Constitution, and achieve and secure the communitarian values and ideals of the Constitution: “to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity.”

Edmund Burke once remarked, “To make us love our country, our country ought to be lovely.”⁹⁴ America was indeed “lovely,” as well as being “exceptional.” The American idea is not confined to that of a political experiment: informed by intense patriotism and nationalism, it is also associated with the vision of America as a

⁹³ Alexander Hamilton, *FP*: 6.

⁹⁴ Burke, *Reflections*, 68.

“redeemer nation” and the American people as a new “chosen people.”⁹⁵ The fusion of nationalism with a messianic zeal produced a view of the creation of the republic not as a political experiment, but as the fulfilment of the millennial hopes of humanity for moral regeneration. Conceived in liberty, America represented a new beginning, a second chance for humanity to return to a Lockean idyll: “in the beginning all the world was America.”⁹⁶ America, in the words of the poet Emma Lazarus was “[t]he New Colossus/ Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame/ with conquering limbs astride from land to land.” America’s *raison d’être* was not conquest – that was for the Old World. America was a nation with a historic mission, possessed of a writ from Providence, and called into being to bring salvation to the Old World and beyond. America, the redeemer nation, would “improve the material and moral lot of all humankind.”⁹⁷ Arthur Schlesinger has indicated that “the Kingdom of God was deemed both imminent in time and immanent in America. It was a short step from salvation at home to the salvation of the world.”⁹⁸

The preamble to the Constitution set forth “communitarian” values, ideals, and ends that were restricted, both in wording and in scope, to the American polity. In contrast, the *Declaration of Independence*, prescribed values, ideals, and ends that were cosmopolitan in scope. For Jefferson, the author of the *Declaration*, America was uniquely placed to set an example for the rest of the world. He enumerated the reasons that compelled the thirteen colonies to “dissolve the political bands which have connected them” to the British crown, in terms of universal truths. He argued that *all* men – not just

⁹⁵ See Ernest L. Tuveson, *Redeemer Nation: The Idea of America's Millennial Role* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968)

⁹⁶ John Locke, *The Second Treatise of Government* (South Bend, IN: Gateway, 1955), §49.

⁹⁷ Carl Cavanagh Hodge, *All of the People, All of the Time: American Government at the End of the Century* (New York: Peter Lang, 1998), 41.

Americans - were created equal and possessed "certain inalienable rights." Furthermore, whenever *any* form of government became destructive to the welfare of the people – not merely the British monarchy – it became the right of the people "to alter or abolish it."⁹⁹

III. Prudence and Responsible Power

Nathan Tarcov maintains that "the Declaration's abstract universal principles leave room for prudence."¹⁰⁰ Indeed, Jefferson argues that "prudence" will guard against the danger that "governments long established" will be altered for "light and transient causes." It was argued in the previous chapter that principles (abstract or otherwise) are not self-applying, and now we must turn our attention to prudence, which is equally not self-applying. Burke distinguished between prudence – which possesses a normative element and is concerned with the good of the whole – from "that little, selfish, pitiful, bastard thing which sometimes goes by the name," but which in fact is little more than shallow cleverness or cunning.¹⁰¹ Aristotle described statesmen like Pericles as prudent because they possessed "a faculty of discerning what things are good for themselves and for mankind."¹⁰² The key to prudence is discerning judgment, what Aristotle termed "deliberative excellence" – something for which there is no scientific formulae, only experience.¹⁰³ In the case of the Founding Fathers, the onset of the French Revolution

⁹⁸ Schlesinger, *Cycles*, 15.

⁹⁹ See Brands, *What America Owes the World*, 2.

¹⁰⁰ Nathan Tarcov, "Principle and Prudence in Foreign Policy: The Founders' Perspective," *The Public Interest* 76 (Summer 1984): 48.

¹⁰¹ Edmund Burke quoted in Coll, "Normative Prudence," 71.

¹⁰² Aristotle, *The Nichomachean Ethics*, trans. Harris Rackham (Hertfordshire, England: Wordsworth Editions, 1996), 1140a24.

¹⁰³ Cf. Hans Morgenthau: "The philosopher knows more than the king... [but the philosopher] cannot act according to his knowledge. The king, even if he knows all the philosopher knows, would still not know for certain what actions the concrete situation requires. Not theoretical knowledge but only the experience of

would severely challenge their faculty for “discerning what things are good for themselves and for mankind,” and begin to define American duties within and beyond their borders.

In the *Declaration*, America had appealed to the world – “the opinion of mankind” – but more specifically to France, for aid and support in the struggle against the British. The outbreak of the French Revolution caused the tables to be turned on the Americans. It was now the turn of France to appeal to America for succour, especially with regard to the *casus foederis* of the 1778 treaty of alliance between the two countries.¹⁰⁴ How was the fledgling republic to react now that others utilized the very principles invoked by Americans? The likes of Jefferson and Madison were inclined to support the revolutionary regime in France, on the basis of common political principles regarding the universal rights of man and the cosmopolitan principles contained in the *Declaration*. It was not difficult to generate sympathy for the French revolutionary cause in America. The French had apparently patterned the *Declaration on the Rights of Man* on the *Declaration of Independence*. Americans could justifiably take pride in the belief that their example had emboldened the French people to overthrow the corrupt Bourbon monarchy and embrace the ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity. In addition, many Americans felt a continued sense of debt to the French for coming to their aid during the struggle for independence.¹⁰⁵ For supporters of the French cause, especially Jefferson and Madison, liberty itself was at stake. The French Revolution, like the American, was

acting can teach him. Yet even that experience will teach him only how to avoid the repetition of yesterday's blunder, not how to commit a new one tomorrow.” Hans J. Morgenthau, *Dilemmas of Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 321.

¹⁰⁴ Tarcov, “Principle and Prudence,” 58.

believed to be a blow for liberty everywhere, and thus America could not be indifferent to its fate. In such circumstances, the United States could not simply rely on being a shining example to the world; a failure to aid revolutionary France against the massed array of European monarchies would not be merely rank ingratitude, but a betrayal of American ideals and principles. As a founded nation, it had a responsibility to the cause of liberty abroad. Indeed, liberty was construed to be indivisible – republican France was a “victim” of aggression by the *ancien regimes*, hoping no doubt to extinguish liberty and republicanism on the Continent, and if they succeeded America might very well be next. For Jefferson, the “liberty of the whole earth” depended on the outcome of the European struggle.¹⁰⁶ For Jefferson and Madison, support for the French Revolution became a “litmus test” of fidelity to the revolution in America – individuals who failed to support the republic abroad were suspected of being disloyal to the republic at home.¹⁰⁷ In the eyes of both men, no one was more suspect than Alexander Hamilton, who championed the cause of American neutrality. They insisted that national honour, responsibility, and interest required the United States to fulfil its treaty obligations and aid France in its hour of need.¹⁰⁸

For Hamilton, the alliance with France was fraught with danger for the fledgling republic. Combining pragmatism with principle, Hamilton argued that honour, responsibility, and interest dictated that the United States not embroil itself in the European struggle. He argued that giving aid to France was not a question of “honour”

¹⁰⁵ Thereby conveniently overlooking the fact that it was the monarchical regime of Louis XVI and not the republican regime that extended aid to the United States. See *Pacificus No. 5*, *PAH*, 15: 90-95.

¹⁰⁶ Lawrence S. Kaplan, *Jefferson and France* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1967), 31.

¹⁰⁷ Karl-Friedrich Walling, *Republican Empire: Alexander Hamilton on War and Free Government* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1999), 215.

but reckless and foolish pride. Hamilton did not dispute the right of the French people to engage in revolution and overthrow the Bourbons, but contrary to Jefferson and Madison, he insisted that neither international law nor liberal principles gave the French the right to involve the United States in their wars. If the character of their revolution was such that they would unite the great powers against them, they had no right to ask the United States to commit suicide with them.¹⁰⁹ American aid to France was indeed tantamount to committing national “suicide.” Describing the United States as being “weak” was an understatement; with neither an army nor a navy worth speaking of, the United States was a “military pipsqueak.” Given this military weakness, it was unlikely that American intervention would alter the European balance of power; American intervention was more likely to antagonize the great powers and involve the United States in a war with Britain. That was a feat of arms in which the United States was unlikely to triumph, and defeat would invariably result in the dissolution of the Union and the destruction of the republic.¹¹⁰

Hamilton believed that a nation ought to hazard any risk to “vindicate its own rights and, to defend its own honor,” but neither principle nor prudence required the United States to take the unnecessary risk of war over the French alliance. For Hamilton, there was no honour in committing national suicide – American interests and the ideals of the American people were best served through an avoidance of war. This did not mean that he had abandoned his belief that “No government could give us tranquility and happiness at home, which did not possess sufficient stability and strength to make us

¹⁰⁸ Brands, *What America Owes the World*, 2.

¹⁰⁹ Walling, *Republican Empire*, 215.

¹¹⁰ See *Pacificus* No. 3; *Americanus* No. 1; and *Americanus* No. 2, *PAH*, 15: 65-69, 669-78, 16: 12-20.

respectable abroad.” “Stability and strength” meant that the Machiavellian moment had to be overcome – the Union had to be made to work. This could be achieved only in the absence of war – a war with Britain was the wrong war with the wrong enemy at the wrong time. In order to make itself “respectable abroad,” the United States needed a period of peace and repose to develop its latent strength – peace and prosperity, not a crusade for liberty, was in the national interest. If the United States could overcome the Machiavellian moment and make the great experiment thrive, it could then “concur in erecting one great American system superior to the control of all transatlantic force or influence and able to dictate the terms of the connection between the old and new worlds!”¹¹¹

IV. Trusteeship, Democratic Statecraft, and Responsible Power

Hamilton did not dispute America’s exceptional status in the world; he was never so obsessed with means as to be oblivious to ends.¹¹² He maintained that America was uniquely placed “to vindicate the honor of the human race, and to teach the rest of the world that assuming brother moderation.”¹¹³ Hamilton’s opposition to crusades for liberty, and his own advocacy of a “moderate” foreign policy was based not solely on pragmatism but a belief that all governments existed as trustees of the people, responsible “for the happiness and interest of their nation.”¹¹⁴ In his capacity as a trustee, the statesman must be guided by the principle, *salus populi suprema lex*. Aside from his legal

¹¹¹ Alexander Hamilton, *FP*: 11.

¹¹² Cf. Greg Russell, “Madison’s Realism and the Role of Domestic Ideals in Foreign Affairs,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 25:4 (Fall 1995): 717.

¹¹³ Hamilton, *FP*: 11.

¹¹⁴ *Pacificus* No. 4, *PAH*. 15: 85.

obligations, he has a moral responsibility to safeguard and improve on the well-being of those he represents. This notion of “representation” is crucial to Hamilton’s arguments for trusteeship, as he ties it to the liberal principles enumerated in the *Declaration*. For Hamilton, the argument that people seek to secure their rights through the institution of governments that derive their just powers from the consent of the governed indicates that governments owe their responsibility to those whose consent they have obtained. “They have not been given the right to secure the rights of those whose consent they do not enjoy.”¹¹⁵ Intervention without prior consent in the affair of other nations, even if it is to spread the blessings of liberty, is a dereliction of a statesman’s duty to his own constituents. In addition, intrusion into the affairs of other nations is morally questionable: it can constitute either imperialism or colonialism, each of which violates the *Declaration* and is antithetical to American ideals. Even if consent could be obtained or given, intervention is not always the best cause of action; thus John Quincy Adams could argue that:

Whenever the standard of freedom and independence has been or shall be unfurled, there will her [America’s] heart, her benediction and her prayers be. But she goes not abroad, in search of monsters to destroy. She is the well-wisher to the freedom and independence of all. She is the champion and vindicator only of her own.¹¹⁶

The statesman must be “the champion and vindicator” of those he represents. As a trustee, he cannot sacrifice the interest of his constituents: he is responsible for not only

¹¹⁵ Tarcov, “Principles and Prudence,” 59.

¹¹⁶ John Quincy Adams, “Address of July 4, 1821,” in *John Quincy Adams and American Continental Empire*, ed. Walter LeFeber (Chicago: Times Books, 1965), 45. In his later years, George F. Kennan adopted Adams’ position as an axiom of American foreign relations and a fundamental principle of international politics. He used Adams’ principle to argue against American intervention around the world

the present, but also for generations yet to be born.¹¹⁷ The responsibility, which the statesman shoulders, is, as Burke put it, “a trust from Providence, for the abuse of which he is deeply answerable.”¹¹⁸ Thus, he has an obligation and a responsibility to act with prudence on behalf of his constituents. The responsible exercise of statecraft, from Hamilton’s perspective, means that the statesman “cannot, consistently with this trust, follow the suggestions of kindness or humanity toward others, to the prejudice of [his] constituents.”¹¹⁹ Hamilton argued that self-preservation is “the first duty of a nation,” just as it was first duty of an individual. Indeed, the *salus populi* is inextricably linked to the *salus patrie*. In the midst of the Peloponnesian War, Pericles observed that “states can bear the misfortunes of individuals, but individuals cannot bear the misfortunes of states.”¹²⁰ Scholars as diverse as Arnold Wolfers and Charles Beitz have argued that the survival of the state is a morally compelling argument *only* if people attach significant value to it.¹²¹ For the statesman, the survival of the state *is* morally compelling – as a trustee, he has no right to play hard and fast with the security of those in his charge. He must see to their long-term interests, and not merely their current preferences. States may be “imagined communities” or “social constructs,” but as Stanley Hoffmann indicates,

on behalf democracy and liberal values, as well as the nation’s role as the world’s *gendarme*. See George F. Kennan, “On American Principles,” *Foreign Affairs* 74:2 (1995): 116–126.

¹¹⁷ Pacificus No. 4, *PAH*, 15:85. Cf. Burke: “Society... becomes a partnership not only between those who are living but between those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are to be born.” *Reflections*, 84–84.

¹¹⁸ Edmund Burke, “Speech at the Conclusion of the Poll in Bristol, November 3, 1774,” in *Edmund Burke on Revolution*, ed. Robert A. Smith (New York: Harcourt and Brace, 1968), 52.

¹¹⁹ Pacificus No. 3, *PAH*, 15: 66.

¹²⁰ Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, trans. Benjamin Jowett (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1998), II. 60.

¹²¹ See Wolfers, “Statesmanship and Moral Choice,” 60ff; and Beitz, *Political Theory*, 34ff.

even though they “may be no more than collections of individuals and borders may be mere facts,” a moral significance is nevertheless attached to them.¹²²

The statesman acting as a trustee must sometimes violate his personal ethical code – he must contract with “diabolical powers” as it were – for the sake of long-range consequentialist reasons. The state must be preserved and public order maintained in order that individuals may practice their moral intentions in peace and security. The means available to the statesman to do this, and the circumstances under which he must act, are not always ethically satisfying. As a trustee, however, he must “be willing to pay the price for using morally dubious means or at least dangerous ones” so that successful and morally effective political action may take place. A statesman who is perfectly consistent with individual moral standards – the moral perfectionist – will invariably find that they come into conflict with the consequentialist responsibilities of trusteeship. As noted by Weber in the previous chapter, the moral perfectionist who believes in the ethic of ultimate ends and who seeks to govern according to the Sermon of the Mount, cannot comprehend the ethical irrationality of the political world and must ultimately founder on the problem of justification of means by ends. In an imperfect world, wrote Machiavelli, a good man bent on doing good “must necessarily come to grief among so many who are not good,” unless he learns “how not to be good.”¹²³ In explaining Machiavelli’s position, Sir Isaiah Berlin suggested that if a statesman chooses the ethic of the Sermon of the Mount over pagan virtues, if he chooses not to learn how to be bad, if he chooses

¹²² Stanley Hoffmann, *Duties Beyond Borders: On the Limits and Possibilities of Ethical International Politics* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1981), 155.

¹²³ Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, trans. Luigi Ricci (New York: Mentor, 1952), chap. 15.

individual perfection over successful political action, then he cannot be responsible for the lives of others.¹²⁴

Does the concept of trusteeship contribute to the notion of a dual standard of morality – that there are separate sets of principles for the political and private spheres, that political acts are subject to one ethical standard, while private acts are subject to another? The cleavage between political and private moralities creates a false dichotomy, which provides moral perfectionists the opportunity to subsume the political sphere under the private. The attempted subsumption of the political sphere under the private does not solve the problems of political morality, but merely serves to further cloud the issue by a continued failure to recognize the ethical irrationality that is an intrinsic part of political morality. The concept of trusteeship does not mean that the ethical end justifies the use of unethical means. Such a doctrine is a false harmonization of ethical standards and human actions, since the nature of political morality is such that there can be no fixed *a priori* determination of the relationship between means and ends. The means-end doctrine poses the danger of a false moral justification of unethical actions, as well as the use of an actor's motives as the criterion for judging political actions.¹²⁵

The individual, in his capacity as a private actor, can have recourse to good intentions as a justifying and unifying principle for his private actions, since they affect others in a manner far different from political actions. Thus, as Hans Morgenthau points out, the individual acting in a private capacity “may say for himself ‘*Fiat justitia, pereat*

¹²⁴ Isaiah Berlin, “The Originality of Machiavelli,” in *Studies of Machiavelli*, ed. Myron P. Gilmore (Firenze, Italy: G. C. Sansoni, 1972), 182; see also Robert Kaplan, “The Return of Ancient Times,” *The Atlantic Monthly* 285:6 (June 2000): 16.

¹²⁵ See Wight, *International Theory*, 244; Nye, *Ethics and Foreign Policy*, 6; Weber, “Politics as a Vocation,” 121ff; and Morgenthau, *Scientific Man*, 183-85.

mundus.”¹²⁶ The statesman, on the other hand, possesses a special duty to act responsibly; he has to live up to the ethic of responsibility, for his actions in the political sphere carry with them consequences for others who must suffer if his actions prove to be unwise. Principles must no doubt inform the statesman’s judgments and actions, but not in their abstract formulation.¹²⁷ Principles will inform and control his judgment regarding the national interest, but he still has to be aware of the circumstances surrounding his political actions and their likely consequences.¹²⁸ It is this exhortation to live up to the responsibilities of trusteeship, rather than an advocacy of a dual standard of morality that prompted Morgenthau to argue that “while the individual has a moral right to sacrifice himself in defense of such a principle [liberty], the state has no right to let its moral disapprobation of the infringement of liberty get in the way of successful political action. itself inspired by the moral principle of national survival.”¹²⁹

V. Circumstances, Ideals and Self-Interests: The Mediation of Responsibilities Within and Beyond Borders

The statesman owes his primary responsibility to his constituents, but at the same time, he cannot be oblivious to the “suggestions of kindness or humanity toward others.” As a trustee, he is responsible for the physical security and economic well-being of those under his charge. He is, however, also responsible for their psychological safety and well-

¹²⁶ Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, 12.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹²⁸ Schlesinger, *Cycles*, 86.

¹²⁹ Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, 12. Cf. Hamilton: “Whence it follows, that an individual may on numerous occasions meritoriously indulge the emotions of generosity and benevolence; not only without an eye to, but even at the expense of his own interest. But a Nation can rarely be justified in pursuing a similar

being.¹³⁰ On the one hand, the United States is “immediate to history,” possessing egoistic interests just like any other state. On the other hand, as a founded nation, the prevalence and resonance in the United States of what Gunnar Myrdal termed the “American Creed”¹³¹ – the liberal values contained in both the *Declaration* and the Constitution – is palpable. The “American Creed” contains the values, principles, and ideals by which Americans judge their foreign policy and the policies of other states, and it also serves to shape American perceptions of the international milieu. Thus, it should come as no surprise that the American people demand that their country’s foreign policy should be directed toward the promotion of liberal values abroad.¹³² The statesman can only ignore these moral sentiments at his own peril. A failure to take into account the moral sentiments and aspirations of the American people will undermine trust in the statesman and in his office, as well as erode the public support that is crucial to the success of any foreign policy initiative.

The “democratization” of foreign policy is not unproblematic. Alexis de Tocqueville observed that a weakness of democracy with regard to foreign policy was its propensity “to obey impulse rather than prudence.”¹³³ The statesman is left with the difficult task of attempting a reconciliation of America’s duties within and beyond its borders. In doing so, he must avoid the tendency of the American people to either seek a return to “isolationism,” thereby avoiding the problem of reconciling self-interests and

course; and when it does so ought to confine itself within much stricter bounds.” *Pacificus* No. 4. *PAH*. 15:85.

¹³⁰ Nye, *Ethics and Foreign Policy*, 10.

¹³¹ See Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma* (New York: Harper and Row, 1962).

¹³² Samuel P. Huntington, “American Ideals versus American Institutions,” *Political Science Quarterly* 97:1 (1982): 18.

ideals, or by confusing the two, to go on a crusade as “a redeemer nation” and purify the world in the name of liberty. This does not mean, however, that the statesman is held entirely hostage to democratic opinions and whims. The statesman can help serve as a moral educator; he can help citizens to shape their moral preferences and to understand the issues facing them. Teddy Roosevelt was famous for using the presidency as a “bully pulpit,” and Woodrow Wilson sought to convince the American people of the importance of liberal internationalism and the need for American participation in a League of Nations. Both men were only partially successful, however. Sometimes, the statesman can be too successful in the moral education of his constituents. In his Farewell Address, George Washington advised Americans that the “Great rule of conduct for us, in regard to foreign Nations is in extending our commercial relations to have with them as little *political* connection as possible.” He maintained that “Europe has a set of primary interests, which to us have none, or a very remote relation. Hence she must be engaged in frequent controversies, the causes of which are essentially foreign to us.” Thus, the responsible cause of action for the United States was not to implicate itself “by artificial ties, in the ordinary vicissitudes of her politics, or the ordinary combinations and collisions of her friendships, or enmities.”¹³³ Washington’s political testament was not based on the assumption that the United States could or should avoid power politics.¹³⁵ but that was its practical result. It was a frank recognition of existing international power relations. Subsequently, Washington and Hamilton’s pragmatic foreign policy prescription was transformed into a dogmatic ideal of “isolationism.”

¹³³ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 2 vols. ed. Phillips Bradley (New York: Vintage Books, 1945), I: 235.

¹³⁴ The Farewell Address, *GW*, 35: 233-34.

Isolationism – conceptualized as American non-involvement in the wars of Europe – was the responsible course of action during the 1790s and even the better part of the nineteenth century. American power was too weak to be of any effect on the balance of power, or it was otherwise preoccupied with fulfilling “Manifest Destiny” and the establishment of a hemispheric hegemony. It worked for over a century – interests and ideals coincided. However, after the United States emerged from its self-imposed “cocoon” during the Great War as a great power, the American rejection of Wilson’s liberal internationalism (however flawed it may have been) in favour of a return to a “Washingtonian” isolationism was not a responsible exercise of America’s new power. Entranced by an outdated vision of America’s place in the world and an urge to return to “normalcy,” the American people chose to embrace the familiar. But in so doing, they failed to recognize that circumstances had changed, and with it so had America’s national interests. In his advice to the prince, Machiavelli issued a warning that:

[I]f it happens that time and circumstances are favourable to one who acts with caution and prudence he will be successful, but if time and circumstances change he will be ruined, because he does not change his mode of procedure. No man is found so prudent as to be able to adapt to this, either because he cannot deviate from that which his nature disposes him, or else because having always prospered by walking in one path, he cannot persuade himself that it is well to leave it.¹³⁶

A prescription for the responsible exercise of power is not carved in stone for all time. The national interest of a state changes with both “time and circumstances” – even seemingly transcendent goals are subject to modification over time, just as the means for

¹³⁵ Hodge, *All of the People*, 37.

¹³⁶ Machiavelli, *The Prince*, chap. 25.

achieving them. On a pragmatic level, what is deemed “responsible” must be appropriate to “time and circumstances.” A responsible exercise of power cannot, however, be divorced from principles, since it must also withstand historical and moral scrutiny – it must not merely reconcile interests and principles, but also balance the duties to others and to self.

CHAPTER 4

Self-Interest Rightly Understood: Responsible Power, the Truman

Doctrine, and the Marshall Plan

There was one people in the world which would fight for others' liberties at its own cost, to its own peril, and with its own toil... ready to cross the ocean that there might be no unjust empire anywhere and that justice, right and law might prevail.

- Livy, *History of Rome*, XXXIII, 33

I. Introduction

In repudiating Woodrow Wilson's vision of America's role and place in the world, Americans sought a return to "normalcy" and the preservation of its "innocence." Having envisaged America's national interest as being inseparable from the larger international interest, Wilson sought to reconcile and harmonize America's responsibilities within and beyond its borders. Thus, as H. W. Brands indicates, Wilson would save the United States by saving the world.¹³⁷ Americans, however, were not prepared to embrace Wilson's vision of "service" to humanity. The prevailing sentiment was, let others fend for themselves; America ought to be left to cultivate its own garden in peace.¹³⁸ Wilson sought to change international politics "as usual;" his isolationist

¹³⁷ H. W. Brands, "The Idea of the National Interest," in *Ambiguous Legacy: U.S. Foreign Relations in the American Century*, ed. Michael J. Hogan (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 126. See also, Tony Smith, *America's Mission: The United States and the Worldwide Struggle for Democracy in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), chaps. 3-4; Frank A. Ninkovich, *The Wilsonian Century: U.S. Foreign Policy Since 1900* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), chap. 2; and Thomas J. Knock, *To End All Wars: Woodrow Wilson and the Quest for a New World Order* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995).

¹³⁸ For the notion of Wilson's mission of service, see Arthur S. Link, "Wilson's Higher Realism," in *Ethics and Statecraft: The Moral Dimension of International Affairs*, ed. Cathal J. Nolan, (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1995), 101. For a contemporary defence of the isolationist stance see Charles A. Beard, *The Open Door at*

successors sought to abolish, or failing that, ignore it, altogether.¹³⁹ The result of two decades of isolationism was a surreal attempt to create a "world without politics," wherein the United States exercised lacklustre financial and commercial leadership without any sense of responsibility to others.¹⁴⁰ Following a policy of isolationism,

Home: A Trial Philosophy of National Interest (New York: Macmillan, 1935); idem, *American Foreign Policy in the Making, 1932-1940: A Study in Responsibilities* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1946).

¹³⁹ The term "isolationism" did not enter into the lexicon of American foreign relations until the early twentieth century. Isolationism, broadly construed, from Washington's Farewell Address onward was essentially Europhobic in nature. Senator Robert A. Taft of Ohio, a twentieth century champion of isolationism, proclaimed that if isolationism was to be defined as remaining aloof from European wars, then he was pleased to count himself among the ranks of isolationists.

American foreign relations have been more extroverted and less insular than the isolationist moniker would suggest. George Washington, in his Farewell Address, had emphasized that "the Great rule of conduct for us, in regard to foreign Nations is in extending our commercial relations to have with them as little *political* connection as possible." Thus, despite a continental/hemispheric focus – exemplified in Manifest Destiny, the Monroe Doctrine, and the Roosevelt Corollary – the United States was a trading nation actively engaged with the world via its commercial interests. The period between the end of the Civil War and America's entry into World War One was characterized by rapid industrialization and the rise of the United States as a great power.

That period saw the issuing of the Open Door notes by Secretary of State John Hays to the European Great Powers and Japan with respect to the China trade; American victory in the Spanish-American War and the acquisition of an overseas "empire;" Teddy Roosevelt's successful mediation of the Treaty of Portsmouth to end the Russo-Japanese War; the construction of the Panama Canal; and a dramatic expansion of the US Navy under the influence of both Roosevelt and Alfred T. Mahan.

On the eve of America's entry into war in 1917, the United States was a Great Power, but it was self-consciously *not* part of the Great Power system. This point was underscored by Wilson's insistence that the United States was only an Associate, not an Allied, Power, as well as his desire to serve as an honest broker among the belligerents.

See, Hodge, *All of the People*, 37; The Farewell Address, *WP*, 35: 233; Kennedy, *Rise and Fall*, 178-82, 242-49; and Robert Endicott Osgood, *Ideals and Self-Interests in American Foreign Relations: The Great Transformation of the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: Chicago University press, 1953), 29-85.

¹⁴⁰ The war had transformed the United States from a debtor nation into the world's largest creditor nation. The United States did take the lead to formulate the Dawes and Young Plans to reschedule German war reparations, to stabilize the German economy, and to revitalize and strengthen the European economy through a recycling of reparation dollars from Germany to Britain and France, to America in the form of war debt payments, then back to Germany in the war of large private loans. American commercial and financial leadership during the inter-war period was technocratic at best, however. It lacked inspiration and a nuanced understanding of the larger international political context. Michael J. Hogan argues that "the theory of cooperative capitalism required important concessions by the great powers to a broader community of interests along with enlightened action by private leaders in managing the international economy." Appreciation of a "broader community of interests" and "enlightened action" was sorely lacking in the United States. When the Great Depression struck, the enactment of the *Smoot-Hawley Tariff Act*, which raised tariffs on dutiable goods to an average of sixty percent, more than any other American action, served to export the depression to Europe. Michael J. Hogan, *Informal Entente: The Private Structure of Anglo-American Economic Diplomacy* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1977), 212; Ninkovich, *Wilsonian Century*, 81. For the argument that the United States failed to exercise the responsibilities of a

America tried to be partly in the world, and ended up being irresponsible. America's entry into the Second World War marked the end of the age of innocence for the United States. There would be no turning back: under the leadership of Franklin Roosevelt, America abandoned the discredited policy of isolationism, embraced internationalism, and mobilized its human and material resources to vanquish the Axis threat.¹⁴¹

The move away from isolationism and the adoption of internationalism as the *leitmotif* of post-war American foreign policy meant that the United States would have to confront the issue of its duties within and beyond its borders again, and reopen discussion on America's role and place in the world.¹⁴² The debate over post-war foreign policy resumed where it had left off with Wilson in 1919,¹⁴³ and it was to be shaped by a generation of American statesmen who had been influenced by him.¹⁴⁴ Those "present at the creation" shared the Wilsonian belief that American interests were inextricably linked with the wider international interest: American prosperity, the survival of democracy, and American security, could not be considered in isolation from the rest of the world. The experience of the Great Depression, the political instability of the 1930s in Europe and Asia, and the subsequent outbreak of war reinforced the belief that the United States would have to assume responsible leadership in the post-war world. The dream of "One

hegemon and provide stability in the international trading and financial system in the 1930s. see Charles P. Kindleberger, *The World in Depression: 1929-1939* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1973).

¹⁴¹ See Robert A. Divine, *Second Chance: The Triumph of Internationalism in America During World War Two* (New York: Atheneum, 1967).

¹⁴² A discussion provoked by Henry Luce's editorial in *Life* magazine on "The American Century," 17 February, 1941. See Henry R. Luce, "The American Century," *Diplomatic History* 23:2 (1999): 159-72.

¹⁴³ Ninkovich, *Wilsonian Century*, 129.

¹⁴⁴ See David Fromkin, *In the Time of the Americans: FDR, Truman, Eisenhower, Marshall, MacArthur – The Generation that Changed America's Role in the World* (New York: Knopf, 1995); Walter Isaacson and Evan Thomas, *Wise Men: Six Friends and the World They Made – Acheson, Bohlen, Harriman, Kennan, Lovett, McCloy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1986); and Lloyd C. Gardner, *Architects of Illusion: Men and Ideas in American Foreign Policy, 1941-1949* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1970).

World”¹⁴⁵ – a neo-Wilsonian international order based on self-determination, free trade, collective security, and multilateral cooperation, centred on the United Nations, would not come to pass. The deterioration in Soviet-American relations, and the emergence of a bipolar rivalry and hostility between the two powers precluded that. This chapter examines and analyzes the American response to the new exigencies of the Cold War. It examines how the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan attempted to reconfigure America’s duties within and beyond its borders, reconcile American interests with American ideals, and reorient the concept of responsible power so as to, in Dean Acheson’s words, “create half a world, a free half, out of the same material without blowing the whole to pieces in the process.”¹⁴⁶

Both during and after the war, geopolitical necessities and past experiences combined to engender a certain amount of ambivalence in American statesmen in their attitude toward the Soviet Union. On the one hand, American statesmen realized that continued cooperation with the Soviets was essential in resolving post-war issues and the creation and maintenance of a stable international order. The memory of the failure of Versailles lingered in the memories of American statesmen. In 1919 strife among the victorious allies in Paris had resulted in American revulsion at the perceived selfishness of the European powers; it led to the repudiation of the League and reinforced the notion that America could “only lose in diplomatic entanglements with the jaded cunning of the Old Continent.”¹⁴⁷ This time around, American statesmen were resolved not to win the

¹⁴⁵ See Wendell L. Wilkie, *One World* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1943).

¹⁴⁶ Acheson, *Apologia pro libe hoc to Present at the Creation*.

¹⁴⁷ Hodge, *All of the People*, 371. See also Osgood, *Ideals and Self-Interests*, 309-32.

The diplomatic wrangling in Paris served only to confirm the nativist Europhobia of the isolationists and alienate the liberals. Disillusioned liberal internationalists, who were disappointed with the “half-loaf” that

war only to lose the peace. They would capitalize on their "second chance" to create the liberal international order that had proved so elusive in the 1920s.¹⁴⁸

Even as the United States sought Soviet cooperation in the post-war period, there were lingering doubts and suspicions regarding Soviet intentions. The Nazi threat was of such magnitude that Churchill and Roosevelt were forced to conclude, what John Lewis Gaddis has termed "a Faustian bargain," with Stalin in order to defeat Hitler.¹⁴⁹ Both men calculated that Stalin was the lesser evil, and enlisted the Soviet dictator to help defeat his erstwhile ally.¹⁵⁰ The practical result, however, of employing one dictator to help vanquish another was that one of them would survive. Thus, even though the Nazi/Fascist threat would be eliminated, totalitarianism in the form of Soviet Communism would remain. The Faustian bargain thus carried with it the risk of another totalitarian regime establishing itself in the heart of Europe.¹⁵¹ The Western Allies had to strike a balance between securing the participation of the Red Army in the war against Japan, while at the

Wilson had brought back from Paris, combined with traditional isolationists to defeat Senate ratification of the Treaty of Versailles and the appended Covenant of the League of Nations. The debates over the Versailles Treaty and the principles of international organization and collective security were characterized by obstreperousness, acrimony, and downright malice. Senator Henry Cabot Lodge, the powerful Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, gathered around him a coterie of "Irreconcilables" – Senators John Reed of Missouri, Miles Poindexter of Washington, William Borah of Idaho, Philander Knox of Pennsylvania – who denounced the Treaty and composed a critical but not entirely unreasonable list of Fourteen Reservations. Wilson failed to help his own cause with his stubborn and wilful refusal to contemplate any amendments to the treaty, and his moral and intellectual disdain for those who did not agree with him. He thus failed to cultivate a potential majority both in the country and in the Senate, with the result that the treaty fell six votes shy of the required two-thirds majority required for ratification – 38 votes to 53.

¹⁴⁸ See Divine, *Second Chance*.

¹⁴⁹ Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of Postwar American National Security Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 3.

¹⁵⁰ On the basis of the time-tested principle that "the enemy of my enemy is my friend."

¹⁵¹ See Churchill to Truman, 12 May, 1945, *FRUS*, Potsdam, 1: 8-9.

same time preventing the Soviets from dominating the Eurasian Continent – a long and cherished Tsarist dream.¹⁵²

Soviet cooperation was needed, moreover, for the creation and maintenance of a stable post-war international system. The preservation of the wartime Grand Alliance into peacetime was necessary if Roosevelt's concept of the Four Policemen – which was to serve as the keystone of the post-war international security architecture – was to work.¹⁵³ Historical experience had demonstrated that the creation and maintenance of a stable international order required the goodwill and cooperation of all the great powers involved. As powerful as the United States was at the end of the war, it could not create international order simply by fiat, "as a seven day wonder."¹⁵⁴ Thus, cooperation in the post-war period was of crucial importance. Henry Kissinger has argued that a shared sense of "legitimacy" – an "agreement about the nature of workable agreements and about the permissible aims and methods of foreign policy" – constitutes a *sine qua non* for a stable international order.¹⁵⁵ The failure of the Versailles settlement had demonstrated that the specifics of what constituted "legitimacy" had to be agreed upon by all the great powers; it could not be imposed. Hence, the successful functioning of the international order was dependent on the great powers internalizing the value of a legitimate settlement. From the American perspective, post-war cooperation with the Soviets was viewed as a mutually reinforcing process by which the Soviet power could

¹⁵² See Nicholas J. Spykman, *The Geography of the Peace*, ed. Helen R. Nicholl (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1944).

¹⁵³ See Gordon Craig and Alexander George, *Force and Statecraft: Diplomatic Problems of Our Times*, 2d ed. (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 101-115.

¹⁵⁴ Eric Johnston, *American Unlimited* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1944), 224.

¹⁵⁵ Henry A. Kissinger, *A World Restored: Metternich, Castlereagh, and the Problems of Peace, 1812-1822* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1957), 1.

be mitigated, and the Soviet Union brought into the mainstream of international politics. The inclusion of the Soviet Union as one of the Four Policemen was not merely intended as a sop to Russian prestige. By making the Soviets a beneficiary and a stakeholder in the international system, it was hoped that they would come to internalize the value of maintaining the system, which in turn would deepen the level of cooperation among the great powers.¹⁵⁶

American policymakers acknowledged that the transformation of the Soviet Union into a “normal” state would not occur overnight, but great strides had apparently been made in the right direction. The Soviets had agreed to join the United Nations and ratify the Charter, they had acceded to the terms of the Atlantic Charter and the Declaration on Liberated Europe, and had dissolved the Comintern. Roosevelt continued to believe that Stalin and the Soviet Union could be reformed and brought into the fold of civilized states if only they were treated in the correct manner. He was thus willing to postpone potentially divisive political and geostrategic issues, specifically the extent of the expansion of Soviet power and influence in Eastern Europe and Asia, until the Axis was defeated.¹⁵⁷ Upon succeeding Roosevelt, Harry Truman was by no means prepared to abandon his predecessor’s vision of a cooperative post-war international order, and the Wilsonian hope for an effective collective security system. Truman, despite Churchill’s

¹⁵⁶ Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, 9.

¹⁵⁷ See Kissinger, *Diplomacy*, 394-422; James MacGregor Burns, *Roosevelt: The Soldier of Freedom* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1970), 557-97; and Stephen E. Ambrose and Douglas G. Brinkley, *Rise to Globalism: American Foreign Policy Since 1938*. 8th rev. ed. (New York: Penguin Books, 1997) . 29-31.

pleadings, refused to use America's preponderant power to force a showdown with Stalin regarding the fate of post-war Europe.¹⁵⁸

In April 1945, as the Western Allies were advancing through Germany, Churchill pressed for a drive to the East to capture Berlin and Prague in advance of the Red Army, for post-war political bargaining. Truman, however, deferred to the judgment of generals Eisenhower and Marshall that the Allied objective should be the destruction of German military forces and that Churchill's proposal carried with it the unnecessary risk of massive Allied casualties for the sake of political ends.¹⁵⁹ When the fighting ceased in Europe in May 1945, Allied forces occupied Germany as far as the Elbe River, parts of Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, and Austria – exceeding the zones of occupation previously agreed upon by the Big Three at the Quebec and Yalta Conferences.¹⁶⁰ Once again Churchill pleaded with Truman to hold the Allied operational lines until Soviet intentions could be divined and a political settlement reached. The advance of the Red Army 120

¹⁵⁸ Despite being Vice-President, Truman was not privy to Roosevelt's inner circle of decision-making regarding grand strategy. Upon succeeding Roosevelt, Truman pledged to continue with his predecessor's foreign policy initiatives. What Roosevelt *might* have done had he lived is a matter of historical conjecture and counterfactual arguments, and will not be attempted here. Churchill sought concerted Anglo-American action to pre-empt Stalin's absorption of Central and Eastern Europe within the Soviet sphere of influence. Truman required proof of Stalin's perfidy but the latter had not yet revealed his hand. Furthermore, the Soviet Union remained an ally whose resources would be required in the Pacific theatre against Japan. The American public had been subjected to wartime propaganda which had extolled the heroism of the Red Army on the Eastern Front and transformed the Soviet dictator into the amiable and avuncular "Uncle Joe." Consequently, the public was not psychologically prepared for a rapid and dramatic *volte face* that cast the Soviets as the new enemy.

¹⁵⁹ See Herbert Feis, *Churchill, Roosevelt, Stalin: The War They Waged and the Peace They Sought* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957), 607-08.

¹⁶⁰ Arrangements had been made to divide Germany up into zones of occupation. Zones were assigned to the United States, Britain, the Soviet Union, and eventually, France as well. Berlin, although lying within the Soviet zone, was itself divided into four occupational zones. An agreement on the control machinery for Germany was signed in November 1944 and ratified by the various parties just before the Yalta Conference in early 1945. It set out an Allied Control Council, composed of allied commanders-in-chief, each of whom had supreme authority within his own occupational zone. The Allied Control Council was responsible for "matters affecting Germany as a whole" but could only take action when there was unanimity among the zonal commanders on specific measures. See, Protocol on zones of occupation and the administration of Greater Berlin, September 12, 1944, and November 1944 Agreement, in *FRUS*, Yalta, 118-21, 124-27.

miles westward along a 400-mile front would constitute, as Churchill maintained, “one of the most melancholy events in history.” He warned that in the wake of the Soviet advance through Central Europe, “an iron curtain is drawn upon their front,” from Norway in the north through Austria in the south. Allied withdrawal to the prearranged occupational zones would result in a “vast zone of Russian-controlled Europe, not necessarily economically Sovietised but police governed.”¹⁶¹ For Churchill, this was the time to reach a political settlement with the Soviets, while the Allies still enjoyed an advantage in the correlation of power – Truman disagreed.

II. The Education of Harry Truman

The war convinced Truman that the United States must not again shirk its responsibility to international collective security as it did in 1919. Truman’s first act as president was to reaffirm American commitment to the United Nations and confirm American participation at the San Francisco Conference.¹⁶² At this time Truman still maintained the belief that the UN could replace the balance of power as the guarantor of international peace and security – a position that placed him at odds with a less sanguine Churchill. In addressing a joint session of Congress on April 16, 1945, four days after taking office, Truman drew a bleak contrast between a new international community based on justice and the world as an “armed camp... doomed to deadly conflict, devoid of hope for real peace.”¹⁶³ Given these choices, Truman argued, there was no alternative to

¹⁶¹ Churchill to Truman, 11 May, 1945; and Churchill to Truman, 12 May, 1945, in *FRUS*, Potsdam, 1: 6-7. 9.

¹⁶² Address Before a Joint Session of Congress, April 16, 1945, *PPPUS:HST*, 1945: 4; see also Truman, *Memoirs*, 1: 271.

¹⁶³ Address Before a Joint Session of Congress, April 16, 1945, 4.

collective security. He reaffirmed Roosevelt's faith in the responsibility and obligation of the wartime allies to maintain their unity so as to establish and preserve the new post-war international order, and to uphold the principle that international disputes would not be resolved by force:

Nothing is more essential to the future peace of the world than continued cooperation of the nations which had to muster the force necessary to defeat the conspiracy of the Axis powers to dominate the world.

While these great states have a special responsibility to enforce the peace, their responsibility is based on the obligations resting upon all states, large and small, not to use force in international relations except in the defence of law. The responsibility of the great states is to serve and not to dominate the world.¹⁶⁴

War sprang, in Truman's mind, from "economic rivalry and social injustice."¹⁶⁵ The UN, therefore, would serve to avert future aggression and ensure permanent peace by fostering cooperation and economic development, and by serving as an instrument for the pacific settlement of disputes. If a peaceful settlement to a conflict could not be found, then the UN would serve as a vehicle for collective security to check aggression. In his Navy Day speech, Truman admitted that some differences existed among the wartime allies. He rejected, however, the notion that what differences existed were "hopeless or irreconcilable," maintaining that there were no "conflicts of interest among the victorious powers so deeply rooted that they cannot be resolved."¹⁶⁶ At this time, Truman retained a belief in the fundamental harmony of interests among the wartime Big Three, and that

¹⁶⁴ Ibid. 5.

¹⁶⁵ Address in San Francisco at the Closing of the United Nations Conference, June 26, 1945, *PPPUS:HST*, 1945: 139.

¹⁶⁶ Address on Foreign Policy at the Navy Day Celebrations in New York, October 27, 1945, *PPPUS:HST*, 1945: 436.

continued international cooperation and the pursuit of prosperity and international order under the auspices of the UN was both desirable and possible.

For Truman, the UN held out the possibility of an eventual world government. It was his hope that the UN would “eventually work on the same basis as the Union of the United States,” with “a world parliamentary set-up” like the US House of Representatives and Senate. Truman likened the UN Charter to the American Constitution, pointing out that when the latter was ratified, “no one regarded it as a perfect document. But it grew and developed and expanded. And upon it there was built a bigger, a better, a more perfect union.”¹⁶⁷ At this time, Truman still retained the dream of “one world:” in his State of the Union address in 1946, he hoped that the UN would eventually become “representative of the world as one society.”¹⁶⁸ Later, in his Radner Lectures on the presidency at Columbia University, Truman restated his analogy between the United States and its Constitution and the world of nation-states and the UN. With patient effort, Truman argued, the UN could still bring about the peaceful resolution of conflicts: “then we’ll reach nearly a millennium and have peace from then on.”¹⁶⁹

American goodwill and sentiment toward the Soviets reached its apogee in 1945. Truman’s summit meeting with Stalin at Potsdam was amiable enough for him to make a favourable comparison between the Soviet dictator and his former political mentor, “Boss” Tom Pendergast of Kansas City. “I can deal with Stalin,” Truman concluded with confidence. Truman’s confidence was to be strained in the coming year and he would be forced to deal with Stalin in a manner quite different from that which he had in mind. A

¹⁶⁷ Address in San Francisco at the Closing of the United Nations Conference, June 26, 1945, 139.

¹⁶⁸ Annual Message to the Congress on the State of the Union, January 6, 1946, *PPPUS:HST*, 1946: 7.

¹⁶⁹ Harry S. Truman, *Truman Speaks* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960), 61.

series of events – failure to address the German question, Soviet pressure on Greece and Turkey, Stalin's bellicose rhetoric, the collapse of the Baruch plan to control atomic energy, and the subversive activities of foreign Communist parties – pointed ominously toward the Soviet Union's aggressive intentions.¹⁷⁰

At Potsdam, plans which envisaged a whole German economy with basic centralized agencies failed to amount to anything. The negotiations on creating a self-sustaining German economy that would enable Germany to pay reparation went nowhere. In the absence of a coherent plan, each occupying power ended up doing as it pleased in its occupation zone.¹⁷¹ More ominous was the sovietization of the Soviet zone under Walter Ulbricht with the forced merger of the Social Democratic Party (SPD) with the Communist party. This led to the impression that Stalin was planning to use the eastern zone as a launching pad to control all of Germany. The situation throughout Western Europe was just as bleak: the anticipated post-war economic recovery failed to materialize and the resulting situation was ripe for Moscow to make mischief.

¹⁷⁰ Averell Harriman, the American ambassador to the Soviet Union complained about "expanding demands being made by the Russians." Harriman told the top civilians in the War Department on July 23, 1945, that the Soviets "are shoving aside all their previous restraint as to being a Continental power and not interested in further acquisitions, and are now apparently seeking to branch in all directions." Soviet Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Molotov conceded that the Soviets had gone "on the offensive" in the postwar period, hoping to extend the frontiers of our Fatherland to the maximum." Stimson diary for July 23, 1945. *FRUS*, Potsdam, 2: 260n; Woodford McClellan, "Molotov Remembers," Cold War International History Project *Bulletin* 1 (Spring 1992): 17, 19.

¹⁷¹ This was the position advocated by Secretary of State James F. Byrnes. The plan to allow each occupying power to take whatever it wanted from its own zone emerged in large part as a reaction to Soviet actions in eastern Germany. The Soviets were stripping the eastern zone of anything and everything of value that could be moved. Entire factories were dismantled for transportation back to Russia. Byrnes' attitude was, rather than arguing with the Soviets and attempting to achieve agreement on a quadripartite basis, better to let each occupying power take whatever it wanted from its own zone. This, as Marc Trachtenberg argues, was tantamount to admitting that the four occupying powers could not pull together to run Germany, and the onset of a spheres of influence policy. See, U.S. Delegation Working Paper, July 23, 1945; Rubin to Oliver, July 25, 1945; Pauley to Maisky, July 27, 1945; and Pauley and Lubin to Truman, September 20, 1945, in *FRUS*, Potsdam, 2: 857, 871, 894-96, 943; and Trachtenberg, *Constructed Peace*, 25, 34.

In 1946, the Soviets failed to withdraw the Red Army from the northern part of Iran, in violation of the joint Anglo-Soviet occupation agreement of 1942. Defying the Iranian government in Tehran, the Soviets attempted to create a separatist puppet regime in the oil-rich province of Azerbaijan.¹⁷² More ominously, from the perspective of American policy-makers, was the movement of Soviet armoured columns toward Tehran in March to enforce Moscow's demand for oil concessions in northern Iran. To the Truman administration, this signalled Stalin's apparent willingness to use the threat or actual use of force in order to secure his objectives in Iran.¹⁷³ Embarrassing publicity in the UN Security Council eventually forced the Soviets to withdraw from northern Iran, albeit with great reluctance and acrimonious charges directed at their former wartime ally. Although the Iranian "crisis" was "resolved" in the chambers of the Security Council, it was far from a textbook example of how the post-war collective security system was meant to function. From the perspective of the Truman administration, the Soviet withdrawal was the result of America's firm diplomatic and political stance in thwarting what was perceived to be Soviet expansionism.¹⁷⁴ In essence, it would not be long before American statesmen, Truman included, concluded that the UN was powerless to resolve great power conflicts – something it was never intended to do.¹⁷⁵

In 1946, the Soviets pressured Turkey for a revision of the Montreux Convention in order to secure joint control of the strategically important Dardanelles and Bosphorus

¹⁷² Bruce Kuniholm, *The Origins of the Cold War in the Near East: Great Power Conflict and Diplomacy in Iran, Turkey, and Greece* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), 270-86, 304-42.

¹⁷³ Eduard Mark, "The War Scare of 1946 and Its Consequences," *Diplomatic History* 21:3 (1997): 391.

¹⁷⁴ Aided no doubt by the presence of the U.S.S. *Missouri* in neighbouring Istanbul and Truman's call for a renewal of conscription.

¹⁷⁵ Ninkovich, *Wilsonian Century*, 153.

(together known as the Straits) and the right to establish Soviet military bases there.¹⁷⁶ During the war, Stalin had insisted on a Soviet military presence in the Straits, and at the Yalta summit in 1945 Roosevelt and Churchill agreed to Stalin's demands for a revision of the Montreux Convention. After the war in Europe ended, Stalin escalated his demands against Turkey and adopted a more belligerent stance. In June 1945, Stalin insisted that the Kars and Ardahan provinces of eastern Turkey, ceded by Moscow to Turkey in 1921, would have to revert to Soviet control. In addition, he demanded that Turkey consent to the construction of Soviet military bases on Turkish territory in the Straits.¹⁷⁷ American statesmen viewed the latter demand with considerable alarm, since it was not lost on them that the initial step in the enforced absorption of the Baltic states in 1940-41 had been the establishment of military bases on their soil.¹⁷⁸

Soviet pressure on Turkey did not relent: Stalin directed the Soviet propaganda machine to launch a "hate Turkey" campaign of such vitriol and bellicosity that the Truman administration deemed it prudent, given events in Iran, to dispatch the battleship U.S.S. *Missouri* to Istanbul as a demonstration of American support for the beleaguered Turkish government.¹⁷⁹ The arrival of the *Missouri* in Istanbul in early April did not deter

¹⁷⁶ Under the terms of the Montreux Convention of 1936, the Straits, which connected the Black Sea with the Mediterranean, were under the control of the Turkish government, which would close them to warships in times of war.

¹⁷⁷ Kuniholm, *Origins of the Cold War in the Near East*, 359-62. For the text of the Soviet diplomatic note to Turkey, see *FRUS*, 1946, 7: 828-29.

¹⁷⁸ Mark, "War Scare," 388.

¹⁷⁹ The ostensible reason for the *Missouri* (named after Truman's home state) "visiting" Istanbul, was the return of the body of Mehmet Munir Ertegün, the Turkish ambassador to the United States who had died in Washington during the war. Traditionally, the remains of chiefs of missions who died in service were returned by warship. It was hoped that the symbolic use of the *Missouri*, the most powerful battleship in the world – a mere ambassador did not really rate the use of a battleship – would not be lost on the Soviets. James Chace, "The Day the Cold War Started," *MHQ: The Quarterly Journal of Military History*, 9:3 (1997): 10; idem, *Acheson: The Secretary of State Who Created the American World* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1998), 153-54.

the Soviets from renewing pressure on Turkey regarding control of the Straits.¹⁸⁰ On August 7, Moscow sent a detailed memo to Ankara (a copy of which was sent to Washington) renewing Soviet demands for joint control and defence of the Straits.¹⁸¹ Stalin's truculence was reinforced by the reassignment of Marshal Zhukov to Odessa, a massive military build-up in the Balkans along the frontier with Turkey, Soviet naval manoeuvres in the Black Sea, and the dispatching of infiltrators and *agents provocateur* into eastern Turkey.¹⁸² It appeared to the Truman administration that whatever Stalin's private assurances, Soviet actions belied his words; war was not merely probable but highly likely given the degree of Soviet belligerence.¹⁸³

Renewed Soviet pressure on Turkey seemed to bring about a "conversion" of sorts of the previously "dovish" Dean Acheson. Hitherto, Acheson had not supported the "get tough" policies advocated by the Navy Secretary James V. Forrestal, trying instead to persuade the Truman administration to seek common ground with the Soviets. Acheson did not idealize Soviet-American relations. His brand of cautious optimism was the result of having worked with the Soviets to establish the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA). During the negotiations with Moscow over the

¹⁸⁰ On April 4, 1946, General Walter Bedell Smith, the American ambassador in Moscow voiced American concerns to Stalin. Smith asked how far the Soviets intended on going with regard to Turkey, and Stalin replied, "We're not going much further." In response to Smith's inquiry whether that "much" included Turkey itself, Stalin reassured him that he had promised Truman at Potsdam that he would not attack Turkey, a pledge he intended on keeping. Stalin then proceeded to recite his grievances against Turkey but appeared amenable to Smith's suggestion that the UN could secure Soviet interests in the Straits. See *FRUS*, 1946, 6: 732-36.

¹⁸¹ See *FRUS*, 1946, 7: 829; and Kuniholm, *Origins of the Cold War in the Near East*, 359-62.

¹⁸² Mark, "War Scare," 414.

¹⁸³ For the view that American fears of a Soviet attack on Turkey were contrived in order to justify military assistance to that country, see Thomas G. Patterson, *On Every Front: The Making of the Cold War* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1979), 55-56; Daniel Yergin, *Shattered Peace: The Origins of the Cold War and the National Security State* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977), 234-35; Lloyd Gardner, *Architects of Illusion*, chap. 8; and Leffler, *Preponderance of Power*, 124-25.

withdrawal of the Red Army from northern Iran and in his efforts to convince the Soviets to internationalize atomic energy, Acheson had persisted in attempting to find ways to accommodate legitimate Soviet concerns. This conciliatory approach was no longer acceptable or possible.

Acheson's "conversion" was the result of changed "facts." Even in the absence of a direct Soviet assault on Turkey, Soviet demands for bases in the Straits would result in the projection of Soviet power into the eastern Mediterranean and a *de facto* end to Turkish independence, not to mention a threat to the British lines of communication with its empire. Unlike northern Iran or Eastern Europe, which had been occupied by the Red Army as a result of the war, the Straits constituted a strategically vital point which had hitherto been free of Soviet control. Britain had historically fulfilled the role of preventing Russian incursions into the eastern Mediterranean.¹⁸⁴ With Britain greatly weakened by the war and no longer able to fulfill its historical function, Acheson was convinced that the United States would have to assume the moral, military, and economic responsibility of resisting Soviet probes in the region.

In Acheson's mind, it had to be made clear to the Soviets that the United States would support the Turks if they were attacked. War between the Western Allies and the Soviets was possible, not necessarily because the Soviets actually sought a war, but because their attempts to intimidate smaller states might escalate into a general conflict if Stalin misjudged Allied resolve. For Acheson, the worst policy that the United States could undertake was one of bluff; he was prepared to recommend a hard line, even at the risk of war. On August 15, Acheson accompanied by Forrestal, Acting Secretary of the

Army Kenneth Royal, and senior officers of the armed services, presented Truman a memorandum prepared by the State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee (SWNCC) on the Soviet threat to Turkey.¹⁸⁵ The report asserted that the "primary objective of the Soviet Union is to obtain control of Turkey," and warned that the fall of that state would result in an extension of Soviet power so strategically perilous that "it will be extremely difficult if not impossible, to prevent the Soviet Union from obtaining control over Greece and over the whole Near and Middle East." Should this happen, the report continued, the Soviet Union would be in a much stronger position to threaten India and China. "The only thing which will deter the Russians will be the conviction that the United States is prepared, if necessary, to meet aggression with force of arms." The SWNCC report concluded: "In our analysis therefore the time has come when we must decide that we shall resist with all means at our disposal any Soviet aggression and in particular, because the case of Turkey would be so clear, any Soviet aggression against Turkey."¹⁸⁶

Truman approved the memorandum, asserting that he would follow its recommendations "to the end." When asked if he understood the implications and the gravity of the situation, that the decision might well mean war, Truman did not hesitate: "We might as well find out whether the Russians are bent on world conquest now as in five or ten years."¹⁸⁷ Four days later, Acheson replied to the Soviet proposal: he rejected Soviet claims that they should share in the responsibility of the defence of the Straits. The

¹⁸⁴ Leffler, *Preponderance of Power*, 124-25.

¹⁸⁵ Acheson, *Present at the Creation*, 195-96; Walter Millis, ed. *The Forrestal Diaries* (New York: Viking, 1951), 192.

¹⁸⁶ *FRUS*, 1946, 7: 840-42.

¹⁸⁷ Millis, *Forrestal Diaries*, 192.

Montreux Convention could be revised, but he made it clear that the United States considered the Straits a matter of its own strategic interest, and that Turkish independence and sovereignty were inviolable.¹⁸⁸ The Truman administration dispatched the carrier U.S.S. *Franklin D. Roosevelt* and its accompanying task force to rendezvous with the *Missouri* already on station in Istanbul, in an impressive display of American naval power. This flexing of American military power was an unequivocal demonstration of American support for Turkey over the issue of the Straits. The Americans had drawn a line in the sand, and the Soviets backed down. A month later, the Soviets line on the Straits was much softer; with Stalin's death in 1953 all Soviet claims against Turkey were repudiated and the question of revising the Montreux Convention was abandoned. Stalin's brinkmanship had failed. Any anticipated rivalry between the so-called "imperialist powers" failed to materialize, and he had underestimated the resolve of Truman, whom he derided as "the gentleman shopkeeper," to stand up to him.¹⁸⁹

III. George Kennan and the Long Telegram

1946 marked a change in the American disposition toward the Soviet Union. Truman's patience had worn thin and he remarked that he was sick of "babying" the Soviets, noting, "unless Russia is faced with an iron fist and strong language another war is in the making. Only one language do they understand – 'how many divisions have

¹⁸⁸ See Acheson to Byrnes, August 15, 1946, and Acheson-Inverchapel meeting, August 20, 1946, in *FRUS*, 1946, 7: 840-42, 849-59.

¹⁸⁹ See Vladimir O. Pechatnov, "The Big Three after World War Two: New Documents on Soviet Thinking about Postwar Relations with the United States and Britain," Working Paper No. 13 of the Cold War International History Project (June 1995), 4-5, 11, 13, 17-18.

you.”¹⁹⁰ As a result, Dean Acheson wrote, Truman quickly learned the limits of international organization and cooperation as a means of achieving security in a hugely divided world, and relegated Wilsonian idealism to a future, better day.¹⁹¹ The initial drift of ambivalence and accommodation was replaced by what Secretary of State James F. Byrnes called, “a policy of patience and firmness.”¹⁹² The intellectual progenitor of the new American policy of firmness was George F. Kennan, a hitherto obscure diplomat serving as the *chargé d'affaires* in the American embassy in Moscow.¹⁹³ From his position in the Moscow embassy, Kennan was initially frustrated as he sought to correct what he perceived to be the American misperception of the Soviet Union as a normal state which it could carry on business as usual with in the post-war period.

In Kennan's mind, American foreign policy toward the Soviets both during and after the war had been simply misguided and wrong. Roosevelt's policy of integrating the Soviets into the mainstream of international political life and Truman's continued accommodation of them was based on a flawed belief that Soviet hostility and suspicions were the result of insecurities that could be eliminated. Hypnotized by the prospect of post-war cooperation with the Soviets, American policy-makers operated on the flawed premise that if Soviet insecurities could be allayed, if the United States could only find the correct approach, a breakthrough could be achieved and the Soviets would reciprocate with cooperation and constructive engagement with the West.¹⁹⁴ In February 1946, Kennan telegraphed the longest and most influential cable in American diplomatic

¹⁹⁰ Truman to Byrnes (unsent), January 5, 1946, in *Strictly Personal and Confidential: The Letters Harry Truman Never Mailed*, ed. Monte Poen (Boston: Little Brown, 1982), 40.

¹⁹¹ Acheson, *Present at the Creation*, 727, 732.

¹⁹² DSB, XIV, June 2 1946, 950.

¹⁹³ Cf. Leffler, *Preponderance of Power*, 60-61; and Trachtenberg, *Constructed Peace*, 41.

history, known to posterity as simply the “Long Telegram.”¹⁹⁵ As Kennan recalled in his memoirs, his famous missive “took the form of an eight-thousand word telegram – all neatly divided like an eighteenth century Protestant sermon, into five parts.”¹⁹⁶

In the Long Telegram Kennan argued that the Soviet leadership was committed to the belief that there could be no “permanent coexistence” in the long run with the United States because of “capitalist encirclement.” Consequently, the Soviets sought to deepen the divisions they believed existed between the imperialist powers and to capitalize on them in the aftermath of inevitable “intra-capitalist wars.” Kennan warned that the Soviets would be insidious, opportunistic, and predatory: whenever possible they would seek “to advance [the] relative strength of USSR as [a] factor in international society.” In pursuit of this objective, the Soviets would advance a dual-track strategy. The first track consisted of official Soviet pronouncements and acknowledged initiatives. “The Russians will participate in international organizations,” Kennan explained, “where they see opportunity of extending Soviet power or of inhibiting or diluting power of others.” The second track of Soviet diplomacy involved the activities of foreign Communist parties and groups not officially tied to the Soviet Union, where the Soviets could exercise plausible deniability. The objective of this second track was “to tear down sources of strength beyond reach of Soviet control.” Thus, Communists in Western states would engage in “efforts to disrupt national self-confidence, to hamstring measures of national defence, to increase social and industrial unrest, to stimulate all forms of disunity.”

¹⁹⁴ See George F. Kennan, *Memoirs*, 2 vols. (Boston: Little, Brown, 1967-1972), 1: 247-70.

¹⁹⁵ Having finally had his opinions solicited, Kennan decided that Washington would not receive “just a fragment of the truth. Here was a case where nothing but the truth would do. They had asked for it. Now, by God, they would have it.” *Ibid.*, 292.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 293. Kennan exaggerates the length of the Long Telegram, it was only 5 540 words.

Segments of society that possessed economic, social, or other grievances, would be encouraged to wage a violent struggle against the status quo. "Here poor will be set against rich, black against white, young against old, newcomers against established residents." Kennan warned that in colonial areas the Soviets would manoeuvre so as to place themselves on the side of the subject peoples and agitate for the expulsion of the Western powers. "On this level, no holds will be barred. Mistakes and weaknesses of Western colonial administrations will be mercilessly exposed and exploited. Liberal opinion in Western countries will be mobilized in order to weaken colonial policies. Resentment among dependent peoples will be stimulated." Behind the efforts and intrigues of Communist fifth columns stood the Soviet regime, a "police regime par excellence, reared in the dim half world of Tsarist police intrigue, accustomed to think primarily in terms of police power."

Kennan argued that the United States should not feel guilty about Soviet intransigence. Cooperation with, and accommodation of, the Soviets were chimeras since Soviet policy bore no correlation with "any objective analysis of [the] situation beyond Russia's borders." Instead, the United States needed to recognize the Soviet Union for what it really was: "a political force committed fanatically to the belief that with US there can be no permanent *modus vivendi*, that it is desirable and necessary that the internal harmony of our society be disrupted, our traditional way of life destroyed, the international authority of our state be broken, if Soviet power is to be secure." Kennan maintained that although Communist doctrine conditioned Soviet leaders to view international politics as an unrelenting class war against the bourgeois West, "at bottom of [the] Kremlin's neurotic view of world affairs is [the] traditional and instinctive

Russian sense of insecurity.” Thus, communist ideology, the Tsarist inheritance, and Russian political culture combined to produce a Soviet regime that was at once irrevocably hostile to the outside world, and insecure about its grip on power at home.

Communist ideology, “with its basic altruism of purpose” served to justify the brutal and cruel regime Soviet leaders imposed on their own people, becoming in Kennan’s clever phrase, a “fig leaf of their moral and intellectual respectability.” Deprived of Communist ideology, Soviet leaders would stand before the bar of history and world opinion as no more than a motley group of wicked and cunning political adventurers, “the last of that long succession of cruel and wasteful Russian rulers who have relentlessly forced their country on to ever new heights of military power in order to guarantee external security for their internally weak regimes.” Coping with the Soviets constituted the “greatest task [American] diplomacy has ever faced and probably greatest it will ever have to face,” but to Kennan it was a challenge the United States was capable of meeting. Tsarist Russia had been expansionist and anti-Western in the past but it had been dealt with, and now it was within the power of the United States to deal with the Soviet Union. As a self-professed realist, Kennan believed that Soviet leaders could understand the objective facts of power, just as Russian Tsars had understood them in the past. Thus, Kennan maintained that although Soviet power was “impervious to [the] logic of reason,” it was “highly sensitive to [the] logic of force.” Whatever their professed commitment to global revolution, the Soviet leadership did not believe in collective suicide or martyrdom. They understood the language of power and would respond in a prudent manner in the face of overwhelming Western power and determination. If the

Western powers dealt with the Soviets in a mature and sober fashion, Kennan maintained, "there need be no prestige-engaging showdowns."¹⁹⁷

IV. Containment

In a subsequent article for *Foreign Affairs*, the prestigious journal of the arch-establishment Council on Foreign Relations, Kennan, writing under the pseudonymic character "X," recommended a policy of "a long-term, patient but firm and vigilant containment of Russian expansive tendencies." Following on his message in the Long Telegram, Kennan declared that Soviet power was akin to "a fluid stream which moves constantly, wherever it is permitted to move, toward a given goal. Its main concern is to make sure that it has filled every nook and cranny available to it in the basin of world power. But if it finds unassailable barriers in its path, it accepts these philosophically and accommodates itself to them." Kennan believed that a policy of effective containment, which by confronting the Soviets with "unalterable counter-force at every point where they show signs of encroaching on the interests of a peaceful and stable world," would ultimately result in "either the break-up or the gradual mellowing of Soviet power." Kennan understood that this protracted struggle with the Soviets, once engaged would have to be waged to the finish, and victory would not be achieved overnight. Since the Soviets were prepared for "a duel of infinite duration," Kennan maintained that Americans would have to gird themselves for battle and hunker-down for a protracted struggle. The struggle would be long and hard, Kennan conceded, but he also concluded that it would not in fact continue forever. The Soviets considered time to be on their

greatest asset, but Kennan thought otherwise. If the American people could find it within themselves to stay the course and man the ramparts, Kennan was confident that history would render a favourable verdict. At some point in the future, the hollowness of Communism would be evident to the entire world.

Already, Kennan argued, the Soviet people were exhausted and brutalized from three decades of Communist rule, "disillusioned, sceptical and no longer as accessible as they once were to the magical attraction which Soviet power still radiates to its followers abroad." Soviet economic development, although impressive in some respects, remained "precariously spotty and uneven." Also, Stalin could not live forever, and the Soviet system had not proven itself capable of managing a peaceful and legitimate transfer of power. As a result the Soviet Union, Kennan argued, was less robust than many outsiders gave it credit for. "Who can say with assurance that the strong light still cast by the Kremlin on the dissatisfied peoples of the western world is not the powerful afterglow of a constellation which is in actuality on the wane?" Kennan argued that although his thesis could not be proven, it could also not be disproven. Yet Kennan was prepared to make a leap of faith to argue that the "possibility remains (and in the opinion of this writer it is a strong one) that Soviet power, like the capitalist world of its conception, bears within it the seeds of its own decay, and that the sprouting of those seeds is well advanced." This leap was as remarkable as it was ironic given Kennan's realist perspective, with its pessimistic view of both human nature and progress. Yet Kennan did reinforce the optimistic American belief in the progressive triumph of history: all America had to do was to hold fast and allow history to work its course. Kennan's article concluded with a

¹⁹⁷ Kennan to Byrnes, February 23, 1946, *FRUS*, 1946, 6: 697-709.

peroration to his compatriots to stand fast, and he appealed to the exceptional nature of the Great Republic and the virtues of its citizenry:

The issue of Soviet-American relations is in essence a test of the over-all 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 great nation.

Surely, there was never a fairer test of national quality than this. In 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 pulling themselves together and accepting the responsibilities of moral and political leadership that history plainly intended them to bear.¹⁹⁸

V. The Truman Doctrine

Perhaps no one was better prepared and more willing to shoulder the "responsibilities of moral and political leadership" that Kennan called for, and rise to the challenge that would "test the over-all worth of the United States as a nation among nations" than Harry S. Truman. When Truman and his advisers formulated the policy of containment, which was to form the centrepiece of his request to Congress for aid to

¹⁹⁸ X [George F. Kennan], "The Sources of Soviet Conduct," *Foreign Affairs* 25:4 (1947): 566-82. Henry L. Stimson, the venerable former Secretary of War, echoed Kennan's calls for the United States to meet the Soviet challenge and assume wider global responsibilities. On the occasion of his eightieth birthday, Stimson posed a challenge to the American people:

"How soon this nation will fully understand the size and nature of its present mission, I do not care to say. But I will venture to assert that in a very large degree the future of mankind depends on the answer to this question. And I am confident that if the issues are clearly presented, the American people will give the right answer. Surely there is here a fair and tempting challenge to all Americans." Henry L. Stimson, "The Challenge to Americans," *Foreign Affairs* 26:1 (1947): 14.

Greece and Turkey in March 1947, American foreign policy reached “a watershed.”¹⁹⁹ In enunciating the doctrine that would come to bear his name, Truman steered the American ship of state resolutely away from renewed isolationism, engaged American power beyond the Western Hemisphere during peacetime in defence of vital American interests, and committed the United States to the defence of liberty abroad.

Truman realized that given the Soviet challenge, a fixed delineation between the domestic and international spheres was no longer possible.²⁰⁰ America’s duties within and beyond its borders had to be reconceptualized so that America’s power could be employed in the service of freedom. Prudence and national interests dictated that the United States could no longer ignore the Soviet challenge and the threat it posed to liberty abroad. Truman was aware that America’s vital strategic interests encompassed the continued freedom and independence of Greece and Turkey, stability in the Middle East, and the continued ability of the liberal-democratic governments of Western Europe to resist Soviet pressures.²⁰¹ Beyond these geopolitical interests, however, Truman

¹⁹⁹ Coffey, “The Statesmanship of Harry Truman,” *The Review of Politics* 47:2 (1985): 237; Henry Kissinger “Reflections on Containment,” *Foreign Affairs* 73:3 (1994): 113-30 ; and Cecil V. Crabb, Jr., *Doctrines on American Foreign Policy: Their Meaning, Roles, and Future* (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), 113-30. Truman remarked that American aid to Greece and Turkey constituted “only the beginning” of a new era in American foreign relations. Truman, *Memoirs*, 2: 104.

²⁰⁰ As Truman put it: “ After World War II it was clear that without American participation there was no power capable of meeting Russia as an equal. If we were to turn our back on the world, areas such as Greece, weakened and divided as a result of the war, would fall into the Soviet orbit without much effort on the part of the Russians. The success of Russia in such areas and our avowed lack of interest would lead to the growth of domestic Communist parties in such European countries as France and Italy, where they were already significant threats. Inaction, withdrawal, ‘Fortress America’ notions could only result in handing to the Russians vast areas of the globe now denied to them.” Truman, *Memoirs*, 2: 102.

²⁰¹ At a high-level meeting at the White House on February 27 with Congressional leaders to garner bipartisan support for Truman’s plan to provide aid to Greece and Turkey, General Marshall “flubbed” his opening statement and Acheson stepped in to make the case on behalf of the administration. “Like apples in a barrel infected by one rotten one,” Acheson told his audience, “the corruption of Greece would infect Iran and all to the east. It would also carry the infection to Africa through Asia Minor and Egypt, and to Europe through Italy and France, already threatened by the strongest domestic Communist parties in Western

considered something of greater importance, the very fate of republican self-government based on the natural rights of man, to be in the balance. Freedom and republican government, and hence the United States could not flourish in a world given over to Communist power and influence.

The United States and other nations had just fought a world war and established the United Nations in the belief that "totalitarian regimes imposed on free peoples, by direct or indirect aggression, undermine the foundations of international peace and hence the security of the United States." Now, Truman told a joint session of Congress, expansionist Communist tyranny had supplanted Nazi barbarism, thereby renewing the struggle between two diametrically opposite ways of life:

At the present moment in world history nearly every nation must choose between alternative ways of life. This choice is 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 on the will of the minority forcibly imposed upon the majority. It relies on terror and oppression, a controlled press and radio, fixed elections, and the suppression of personal freedoms.

Therefore, Truman declared, "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."²⁰²

Europe. The Soviets Union was playing one of the greatest gambles in history at minimal cost. It did not need to win all the possibilities. Even one or two offered immense gains. We and we alone were in a position to break up the play." Acheson, *Present at the Creation*, 219.

²⁰² Special Message to the Congress on Greece and Turkey: The Truman Doctrine, March 12, 1947, *PPPUS:HST*, 1947: 178-79.

It was no accident that Truman divided the world into two antagonistic camps: he was rallying the defence of the decent regime against the immoderate claims of totalitarian Communism, and a clear distinction had to be established.²⁰³ Unlike Henry Wallace, who led the radical attack on the administration's policies toward the Soviets, Truman was never beguiled by the notion that "the false philosophy" of Communism was not so bad, or that it represented simply an alternative form of economic organization.²⁰⁴ He rejected the premise that the Soviet Union was just like any other great power, possessed of limited ambitions, as well as the notion that the United States was morally equivalent to the Soviet Union. At the root of Truman's anti-totalitarian stance was his reverence for what he called the "greatest government in the world." Republican government, in Truman's estimation, rested upon a set of political principles which expressed a historically unique idea about human nature and government: "It sets up the

²⁰³ Coffey, "Statesmanship of Harry Truman," 237; Gaddis, *The Long Peace*, 36.

Acheson was in charge of drafting Truman's speech to Congress on the Truman Doctrine. Kennan was shown an advanced copy of the speech and was horrified. He was opposed to the ideological tone and the universal scope contained in Acheson's draft for Truman. It was, to Kennan, highly ideological – dividing the world into two opposing camps and it envisaged an open-ended commitment to aid "free peoples." Kennan feared that Truman's speech might actually provoke the Soviet Union into declaring war. Kennan drafted a toned-down version of the speech that was more nuanced, which focused specifically on the problems of Greece and Turkey. Acheson rejected Kennan's draft. See, Joseph M. Jones, *Fifteen Weeks: February 21 – June 5, 1947* (New York: Harcourt, 1955), 154-55; and Kennan, *Memoirs*, 1: 315, 321.

One of Kennan's first task as the director of the newly created Policy Planning Staff (PPS) in the State Department was to draft a memorandum to remove any "dangerous impressions" left by the enunciation of the Truman Doctrine. See, PPS Memo, May 23, 1947, *FRUS*, 1947, 3: 229.

During subsequent Congressional hearings before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Acheson sought to temper the universal scope of the Truman Doctrine. He argued that American actions would have to be governed by circumstances. American officials, Acheson maintained, would respond to crises from abroad on the basis of their merits, and tailor a response appropriate to the prevailing circumstances:

Senator Tom Connally: This is not a pattern out of a tailor's shop to fit everybody in the world and every nation in the world, because the conditions in no two nations are identical. Is that not so?

Acheson: Yes sir; that is true, and whether there are requests, of course, will be left to the future, but whatever they are, they have to be judged, as you say, according to the circumstances of each specific case.

U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, *Hearings on S. 938 to Provide for Assistance to Greece and Turkey*, 80th Cong., 1st sess. (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1947), 13.

dignity of the individual and his rights.”²⁰⁵ The principles that Truman referred to were those of Locke, Hamilton, Madison, and Jefferson, not those of Marx or Lenin.

Truman’s conception of the national interest was not limited to material considerations, but instead bore a distinct moral quality and a lucid sense of political meaning and purpose. Truman understood that the perpetuation of freedom and republican government in the United States required a vigorous foreign policy, which entailed risk and sacrifice.²⁰⁶ Interests and ideals intersected to compel the United States to protect democracy and freedom abroad. After his message to Congress, Eleanor Roosevelt wrote to Truman arguing that the best way to combat the Communist challenge was to pursue progressive policies at home. Truman agreed with Mrs. Roosevelt but maintained steadfastly that:

The fact that as much as the world needs a progressive America, the American way of life cannot survive unless other peoples who want to adopt that pattern of life throughout the world can so without fear and in the hope of success. If this is to be possible we cannot allow the forces of disintegration to go unchecked.²⁰⁷

Truman understood the power of the American example – it was after all part of the American conception of self – but he also realized its limits. Like the earlier Nazi

²⁰⁴ Truman, *Memoirs*, 2: 185.

²⁰⁵ Truman, *Truman Speaks*, 37.

²⁰⁶ This belied the fact that there was a pervasive fear in high-level policymaking circles that the American people might sooner or later turn away from international politics and involvement. The American people had, after all, been through years of deprivation, after a long depression and a long war. Now, calls for further sacrifice might very well fall on deaf ears. As Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., put it: “A nation’s capacity for high –tension political tension is limited. Nature insists on a respite. People can no longer gird themselves for heroic effort. They yearn to immerse themselves in the privacies of life. Worn out by the constant summons to battle, weary of ceaseless national activity, disillusioned by the results, they seek a new dispensation, an interlude of rest and recuperation.” Thus, the American people, feeling secure behind their borders, might very well be tempted to revert to isolationism, and American policymakers “remembered very clearly what had happened after the First World War.” Schlesinger, *Cycles*, 28; Trachtenberg, *Constructed Peace*, 50.

menace, the Soviets represented an existential threat to the United States. America faced yet another “Machiavellian moment.” The problem cast by the Soviets was not a direct threat to the American homeland and the nation’s physical existence (at least not yet), but rather a threat to the American identity and the American way of life. The United States could continue, in all probability, to exist in a world dominated by totalitarian states. The question was *how* it would do so, and *what* American society would evolve, or more likely devolve into in the process. If totalitarianism triumphed abroad, the American way of life would be transformed radically; the American Creed would have to change. Could the institutions of republican government survive under conditions of continual crisis and perpetual preparation for war? Would the Constitution and the Bill of Rights continue to matter under those conditions? In a world of totalitarian states, could the United States avoid becoming a garrison state? Truman believed that if the price exacted by not containing Soviet power was the loss of the American way of life and identity, then it was too high a price.

Not everyone agreed with the administration’s perception of the Soviet threat.²⁰⁷

Conservatives – already distrustful of the expansion of the role of the state under

²⁰⁷ Truman quoted in Robert J. Donovan, *Conflict and Crisis: The Presidency of Harry S. Truman, 1945-1948* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1977), 287.

²⁰⁸ Truman was fully aware of the difficulty involved in trying to convince what Joseph Jones called “a questionable Congress and [an] apathetic electorate.” In late 1946 and early 1947 the Soviets appeared to be conciliatory, and the media were quick to pick up on this. Public opinion polls showed that the American people were reasonably confident that US-Soviet relations were on the mend and not particularly in favour of more forceful American measures. Congress did not appear to be any more eager to take positive action. The Republican victory in the 1946 mid-term elections “resurrected the spectre of economic nationalism and political isolationism.” Among the freshman class of Republican senators were John Bricker of Ohio, Joseph McCarthy of Wisconsin, Zales Ecton of Montana, Arthur Watkins of Utah, and Henry Dworshak of Idaho. They swelled the ranks of isolationist-leaning Republicans from the Midwestern and mountain states elected since 1938. As Melvyn Leffler indicates, these senators’ “concerns with overseas development were limited; their willingness to incur shortages or postpone tax reductions was non-existent. They were still committed to America first, and their antipathy to foreign entanglements and financial sacrifice was pronounced.” Jones, *Fifteen Weeks*. : Leffler, *Preponderance of Power*, 145.

Roosevelt and Truman under the guises of the New and Fair Deals – were also wary of the administration's initiatives. They perceived quite correctly that the Cold War with the Soviets would "recalibrate the relationship between domestic politics and foreign affairs" in the country.²⁰⁹ "Mr. Republican" Senator Robert A. Taft, a leading conservative critic of the administration, was not very different from Truman in his conviction that "the ultimate purpose of [American] foreign policy must be to protect the liberty of the people of the United States," and his fear of a rise of a garrison state. The two men differed, however, in their understanding of how a garrison state might come into being. While Truman saw inaction in the face of Soviet expansionism as being likely to lead to the need for a garrison state, Taft was deeply worried that the Truman Doctrine and the involvement it called for would overly limit America's freedom of action abroad, involve the nation in war, and ultimately compromise and erode the traditional roots of American society.²¹⁰

Taft and his fellow conservatives were not without grounds for their worries. The American republic, with its free institutions and what de Tocqueville called its "natural democratic peacefulness" was unsuited for the struggle. The realities and exigencies of modern warfare meant that war was now *total*. The productive energies of an entire modern industrial economy would have to be mobilized in support of national security objectives in peacetime. The armed forces were unified, military budgets expanded,

²⁰⁹ Hodge, *All of the People*, 138. See also, Robert Jervis, "America and the Twentieth Century," in *Ambiguous Legacy: U.S. Foreign Relations in the "American Century,"* ed. Michael J. Hogan (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 95.

²¹⁰ Robert A. Taft, *A Foreign Policy for Americans* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1951), 11; Michael J. Hogan, *A Cross of Iron: Harry S. Truman and the Origins of the National Security State, 1945-1954* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 70, 99-101, 329; Henry W. Berger, "Senator Robert A.

science harnessed for military purposes, and new national security institutions, like the National Security Council and the Central Intelligence Agency, established.²¹¹ Vigilance commensurate with the Soviet threat appeared to require the acquisition of new powers by the state, higher taxes, mobilization, monitoring of subversives, a reordering of the domestic political economy, and further restrictions on individual rights and civil liberties.²¹² Thus, all this carried with it a genuine concern that the United States, in the course of the struggle with the Soviet Union, might become paradoxically a garrison state itself – the very outcome Truman hoped to avoid.²¹³ In the Long Telegram, Kennan maintained that one of America's greatest strengths lay in its "methods and conception of human society," and warned that the greatest danger to the republic was the loss of its moral compass and soul as it tried to contain Communist expansion, thus "becoming like those with whom we are coping."²¹⁴

In negotiating aid for Greece and Turkey, Truman came under criticism for supporting reactionary and corrupt regimes. Most liberals, with Henry Wallace at the fore, were morally offended by the administration's decision to provide aid to the Greek

Taft Dissents from Military Escalation," in *Cold War Critics: Alternatives to American Foreign Policy in the Truman Years*, ed. Thomas G. Paterson (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1971), 167-69.

²¹¹ Hogan, *Cross of Iron*, 11-12.

²¹² Melvyn P. Leffler, "National Security," *The Journal of American History* 77:1 (1990): 147.

²¹³ Truman understood the risks involved, but maintained that it was necessary for the United States to mobilize and resist the Soviet threat. If it failed to do so, Truman warned, if the American people abandoned internationalism for renewed isolationism, the consequences would be severe and they would have to accept:

a much higher level of mobilization than we have today. It would require a stringent and comprehensive system of allocation and rationing in order to husband our smaller resources. It would require us to become a garrison state, and to impose upon ourselves a system of centralized regimentation unlike anything we have ever known. In the end.... we would face the prospect of bloody battle – and on our own shores. The ultimate cost of such a policy would be incalculable. Its adoption would be a mandate for national suicide.

Special Message to Congress on the Mutual Security Program, March 6, 1952, *PPPUS:HST*, 1952-1953: 189.

and Turkish regimes. Prominent liberal critics of the administration included: the president of the Farmer's Union, James Patton; FDR's son Elliott Roosevelt, who criticized Truman for betraying his father's legacy and vision; the liberal columnist, Samuel Grafton; the ex-New York mayor and former director of the UNRRA, Fiorello LaGuardia; Freda Kirchwey, editor of the *Nation*; Senator Claude Pepper of Florida; and Senator Glen H. Taylor of Idaho. Liberal opposition to the administration, however, was not all of one piece. Even as Wallace was leading a segment of the liberal opposition against the Truman Doctrine, an influential group of liberals had rejected his approach and formed a new anti-Communist progressive organization, Americans for Democratic Action (ADA). Prominent liberals in the ADA included: young politicians like Chester Bowles, Hubert Humphrey, Wilson Wyatt, and Paul Porter; the economist, Leon Henderson; the historian, Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr.; and journalists such as Marquis Childs, James A. Wechsler, and Elmer Davis.²¹⁵ The liberals of the ADA were representative of the tough-minded liberalism of the 1930s and 1940s that Schlesinger extolled in his 1949 book, *The Vital Center*. They challenged Wallace's direction and leadership of the liberal/progressive movement and sought to make liberalism consonant with both welfare *and* warfare. They countered Wallace's moral critique of the Truman Doctrine with moral arguments of their own, based on a deep-seated and intestinal fear and abhorrence of totalitarianism. They were joined in this by prominent

²¹⁴ Kennan to Byrnes, February 23, 1946, 709.

²¹⁵ Alonzo L. Hamby, "Henry A. Wallace, the Liberals, and Soviet-American Relations," *The Review of Politics* 30:4 (1968): 163-64; Thomas G. Paterson, introduction to *Cold War Critics*, 7-8; idem, "The Dissent of Senator Claude Pepper," *ibid.*, 114-39; "Senator Glen H. Taylor: Questioning American Unilateralism," *ibid.*, 140-66.

Marxists/Communists-turned-anti-Communists, like the philosophers, John Burnham and Sidney Hook.²¹⁶

The liberal and anti-Communist opposition to Wallace ought not to detract, however, from his valid criticisms of the nature of the Greek and Turkish regimes. The Greek and Turkish people could not be considered “free,” according to the criteria normally applied by Americans. Greece was governed by a monarchy, and a victory by right-wing political forces in the country’s civil war did not augur well for the transformation of that country into a democracy, at least in the short-run. The Turkish republic, although modern and secular, was nonetheless authoritarian. It was a one-party state which had carried out reforms of Turkish society by draconian and authoritarian means, and where the armed forces served periodically as the ultimate arbiters of domestic politics. Truman understood, however, that the injunction to collaborate only with “perfect” democracies would mean that the United States could deal only with very few countries, and thus democracy would not be able to defend itself in the face of totalitarianism.

Decades before Jeanne Kirkpatrick advanced a similar thesis, Truman understood that there existed a distinction between totalitarian and authoritarian regimes.²¹⁷ He perceived that authoritarian regimes are less oppressive than totalitarian ones, and unlike the latter, they were capable of improvement and reform. Truman maintained that a spark

²¹⁶ Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Vital Center: The Politics of Freedom* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1949); Hamby, “Henry A. Wallace,” 168; idem, *Beyond the New Deal: Harry S. Truman and American Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1973), 18-19, 280-81; John Patrick Diggins, *The Proud Decades: America in War and Peace, 1941-1960* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1988), 172-73; Richard H. Pells, *The Liberal Mind in a Conservative Age: American Intellectuals in the 1940s and 1950s* (New York: Harper and Row, 1985), 136; Hogan, *Cross of Iron*, 421.

of the democratic ideal existed in both Greece and Turkey, and that both interests and ideals compelled the United States to seek its realization. At the Jefferson Day Dinner, Truman argued that:

No class, no party, no nation has a monopoly on Jefferson's principles. Out of the silence of oppressed peoples, out of the despair of those who have lost their freedom, there comes to us an expression of longing. Repeated again and again, in many tongues, from many directions, it is a plea from men, women, and children for the freedom that Thomas Jefferson proclaimed an inalienable right.²¹⁸

Greece and Turkey clearly did not meet the democratic test. Furthermore, the Truman Doctrine and American aid could not guarantee that both Greece and Turkey would evolve into democracies. From Truman's perspective, however, what could be guaranteed was that a failure on the part of the United States to aid Greece and Turkey would result in those countries coming under Soviet hegemony and passing behind the Iron Curtain, thereby giving them no chance at all to develop in a democratic direction.²¹⁹ The radical liberals attacked Truman for adopting a double standard of morality with Greece and Turkey – if the differentiation between authoritarian and totalitarian regimes could in fact be called a double standard. Yet those same critics, Wallace especially, adopted a double standard of their own when it came to Soviet actions. While excoriating American policy on the basis of their lofty moral standards, they consistently refused to

²¹⁷ See Jeanne J. Kirkpatrick, *Dictatorships and Double Standards: Rationalism and Reason in Politics* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982).

²¹⁸ Address at the Jefferson Day Dinner, *PPPUS:HST*, 1947: 192-93.

²¹⁹ With regard to the question of the evolution of democracy in Greece and Turkey, the key point is Truman's insistence that Greece (and by extension, Turkey) be assisted so that it could "become a self-supporting and self-respecting democracy." Special Message to the Congress on Greece and Turkey, March 12, 1947, 177.

apply those same moral standards to the Soviet Union and found excuses for Soviet conduct.

VI. The Marshall Plan

The Truman Doctrine made a delicate choice in determining economic means as the primary source of aid for Greece and Turkey. Economic and financial aid was calculated to create a favourable response not merely in those two countries, but also in the rest of Europe. Economic means were given primacy, while military measures were subordinated entirely. The utilization of economic and financial aid linked the Truman Doctrine to the entire structure of relief, rehabilitation, loans, and grants that been developed both during and after the war. It could be made to appear as an extension of past practices, modified only by the new strategy of containment. Furthermore, economic and financial aid avoided the sensitive moral and political questions regarding “interference” in the domestic affairs of other states. By subordinating military means entirely, the Truman administration was able to circumvent the criticism that the United States was making counter-threats against the Soviets, and thus endangering world peace.²²⁰

The Truman Doctrine’s initial focus on the Eastern Mediterranean threatened, however, to distract American attention from Western Europe. In the spring of 1947, Assistant Undersecretary of State for Economic Affairs, Will Clayton penned an urgent memorandum to General Marshall and Dean Acheson. Having recently returned from Europe, Clayton was deeply disturbed by the situation there and its possible implications

for the United States. He noted that systematic campaigns, "feeding on hunger and economic misery and frustration," were underway which threatened to destroy the national independence and integrity of the democratic states of Western Europe.²²¹ There was a fear that the Communists might exploit the psychological demoralization of Western Europe stemming from immiseration, war damage, and the slow pace of economic recovery. The Truman Doctrine noted that "the seeds of totalitarian regimes are nurtured by misery and want. They spread and grow in the evil soil of poverty and strife. They reach their full growth when the hope of a people for a better life has died."²²²

The American solution was to reconstitute Europe through economic means. Acheson, in a speech at the Delta State Teachers College in Cleveland, Mississippi, emphasized that America's goal was not to provide relief to Europe, but to revive the industry, agriculture, and trade in Europe in order that stricken countries could be self-supporting once again. Echoing the Truman Doctrine, Acheson reiterated the inseparability of American security from the fate of Europe:

Not only do humans exist in narrow economic margins, but also human dignity, human freedom, and democratic institutions.

It is one of the principal aims of our foreign policy today to use of economic and financial resources to widen these margins. It is necessary if we are to preserve our own freedoms and preserve our own democratic institutions. It is necessary for our national security. It is our duty and privilege as human beings.²²³

²²⁰ William Reitzel, M. A. Kaplan, and C. G. Coblenz, *United States Foreign Policy, 1945-1955* (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1958), 116; Crabb, *Doctrines of American Foreign Policy*, 138.

²²¹ Acheson, *Present at the Creation*, 226.

²²² Special Message to the Congress on Greece and Turkey, March 12, 1947, 178.

²²³ Acheson, *Present at the Creation*, 229.

Acheson's speech became the springboard for the European Recovery Plan – better known as the Marshall Plan. It was an ambitious plan to reconstitute Europe by economic means, formulated in response to fears that the Soviets would exploit the demoralized condition of Western Europe democracies through external intimidation, internal subversion, or the Europeans themselves electing Communists into office.²²⁴

In presenting the case for the Marshall Plan to Congress and the American people, the Truman administration argued for the coincidence of American interests and aid to Western Europe. American statesmen attempted to make the case that by doing good for Europe, Americans were in fact securing their own interests. Truman and his advisers stressed the point that humanitarian concerns joined with security considerations in helping Western Europe overcome its problems of wartime destruction and economic dislocation. European recovery, it was pointed out, was essential for the American economy. Europe constituted an important hub in the international financial and trading system, and its collapse would have dire consequences for the United States and the global economy. As with the Truman Doctrine, it was emphasized that the perpetuation of the American Creed depended upon the survival of European liberal democracy. In

²²⁴ Kennan viewed the Marshall Plan as part of an overall political and psychological offensive designed to influence Soviet actions, and thus sought to extend Marshall aid to the Soviets and their Eastern European satellites. Kennan considered the Marshall Plan to be an instrument to hasten the reunification of Europe, not to prolong its division, and to allow the United States to disengage from the Continent, not to entangle it there. He did not consider the view the Iron Curtain as being permanent, and neither did he believe in the inevitability of a Soviet sphere of influence in Europe. Kennan believed that by allowing the Eastern European states to participate in the Marshall Plan, it would weaken Soviet influence in the region and reorient those states toward the West. Thus, Kennan viewed the Marshall Plan as instrumental in achieving three objectives: the creation of an autonomous and independent Europe, a more moderate regime in Moscow, and a self-contained United States unencumbered by Europe. In contrast, Acheson was willing to extend Marshall aid to the Soviets – not because he was looking for the reunification of the Continent (which he considered premature, imprudent, and naïve), but because he wanted the onus for the division of Europe to fall on the Soviets. Acheson saw the Marshall Plan as a means to consolidate the Western bloc, to prevent the Soviets from absorbing Germany, and the starting point for the creation of an Atlantic Community.

this case, America was not aiding “corrupt” and “reactionary” regimes, but states with which it shared a common liberal political tradition and culture. The disappearance of liberty in France or Britain would have adverse and profound consequences for liberty in the United States. Truman told Congress that American aid for European reconstruction was essential for three reasons:

The American tradition of extending a helping hand to people in distress, our concerns for the building of a healthy world economy which can make possible ever-increasing standards of living for our people, and our overwhelming concern for the maintenance of a civilization of free men and free institutions, all combine to give us this great interest in European recovery.²²⁵

Winston Churchill described the Marshall Plan as “the most unsordid act in history.”²²⁶ The United States committed \$13 billion over a period of four years for the economic recovery of Europe.²²⁷ There is no doubting the sincerity of the United States’ desire to combat “hunger, poverty, desperation and chaos” in Europe.²²⁸ American statesmen felt that the reconstruction of Western Europe was not merely morally right, but natural and even obligatory. The degree of American self-interest ought not to be ignored, but a morally right action need not be entirely self-abnegating. In his analysis of American democracy, Alexis de Tocqueville observed that Americans were able to minimize the atomizing effects of individualism through “the principle of self-interest

²²⁵ Special Message to the Congress on the Marshall Plan, December 19, 1947, *PPPUS:HST*, 1947: 516.

²²⁶ In his Memoirs, Truman stressed the uniqueness of the Marshall Plan: “Never before in history has one nation faced so vast an undertaking as that confronting the United States of *repairing and salvaging the victors as well as the vanquished*.... For the first time in the history of the world a victor was willing to *restore the vanquished as well as help its allies*.” Truman, *Memoirs*, 2: 110. emphasis added. Henry Kissinger has commented that “only a country as idealistic, as pioneering, and as relatively inexperienced as the United States could have advanced a plan for *global* economic recovery based solely on its own resources.” Kissinger, *Diplomacy*, 453.

²²⁷ See Michael J. Hogan, *The Marshall Plan: American, Britain, and the Reconstruction of Western Europe, 1947-1955* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

rightly understood.” Americans rarely speak of the nobility of virtue in their everyday discourse, but they constantly demonstrate it by proving that an individual can fulfill his self-interest by doing good for his fellow man. “The American moralists do not profess that men ought to sacrifice themselves for their fellow creatures *because* it is noble to make such sacrifices, but they boldly aver that such sacrifices are as necessary to him who imposes them upon himself as to him for whose sake they are made.”²²⁹ The Marshall Plan with its blending of interests and moral principles typifies “the principle of self-interest rightly understood” and the responsible exercise of power.

VII. Truman and Responsible Power

A key measure of statecraft is the ability to make discretionary judgments within the context of existing political realities.²³⁰ International politics, as a subset of moral and political conduct, are governed by the virtue of prudence – the art of achieving the best possible outcome given the circumstances. Prudent statesmen understand that in frequent cases they must choose the lesser of evils, and that their choices are exercised within the exigencies that limit the alternatives available to them. They understand that their hands will be “dirty” since sometimes the lesser evil must be chosen, and that choices are always made within exigencies that constrain available alternatives. For Truman, the exercise of prudential and responsible statecraft meant that his hands would be “dirtied,” but the support of so-called authoritarian regimes was the lesser of evils. The moral

²²⁸ DSB, XIV, June 15, 1947, 1160.

²²⁹ De Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 2: 121-22.

²³⁰ In his *Memoirs*, Truman noted that it was “time to align the United States clearly on the side, and the head, of the free world. I knew that George Washington’s spirit would be invoked against me, and Henry Clay’s, and all the other patron saints of the isolationists. But I was convinced that the policy I was about to

statesman's "dirty hands," as Michael Walzer indicates, do not represent a "badge of shame," but rather his moral integrity:

Here is the moral politician: it is by his dirty hands that we know him. If he were a moral man and nothing else, his hands would not be dirty; if he were a politician and nothing else, he would pretend that they were clean.²³¹

Truman understood the elements of prudence and sought to educate the American people to think about international politics in a mature and sophisticated manner. He was under no illusions that the United States could do no wrong in terms of its most fundamental and cherished values – the United States could and would make mistakes. Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely, and American power was no exception. Truman did not believe, however, that the United States could never do right in terms of its own values; he retained a faith that American power could make a positive impact on freedom in other nations. Should the United States go astray, its own free institutions would serve as checks and balances. As Truman put it: "No government is perfect. One of the chief virtues of a democracy, however, is that its defects are always visible and under democratic procedures can be pointed out and corrected."²³² It is precisely this democratic "transparency" that allows us to see the moral statesman's dirty hands for what they truly are. Moral perfectionists, who would have the statesman possess clean hands, would turn him either into a liar or a saint. As Hans Morgenthau pointed out, the individual who recognizes the moral tragedy of his situation but who is willing to act nonetheless, and thus "dirty" his hands, is ethically and morally superior to

proclaim was indeed as much required by the condition of my day as was Washington's by the situation in his era and Monroe's doctrine by the circumstances which he then faced." Truman, *Memoirs*, 2: 102.

²³¹ Michael Walzer, "Political Action: The Problem of Dirty Hands," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 2:2 (1973): 168.

the individual who would commit no evil at all: "By avoiding a particular action because it is unjust, the perfectionist does nothing but exchange blindly one injustice for another... [His] personal abstention from evil... does not affect the existence of evil in the world but only destroys the faculty of discriminating between different evils."²³² Perfectionism in morality or politics is seldom, if ever, to be discovered, and it is certainly not to be found in the foreign relations of the United States, and the search for perfectionism merely leads to endless mirages – it might be found in theories but rarely in practice. Truman did not seek perfection; he understood that the quest for perfection – an intrinsic part of his nation's historical myth – would be detrimental to the good and the attainable. What he sought and achieved was thus not perfection, but a foreign policy that could best withstand the test of both interests and ideals and do justice to America's newfound responsibilities both at home and abroad.

Alexis de Tocqueville warned that in "sceptical ages it is always to be feared... that men may perpetually give way to their daily casual desires, and that, wholly renouncing whatever cannot be acquired without protracted effort, they may establish nothing great, permanent, and calm."²³³ Truman understood that the American people, having just successfully waged war to save the world from fascism, wanted nothing more than a return to "normalcy" where they could "give way to their daily casual desires." The United States had emerged from the war with a preponderance of power, and Truman understood that with power comes responsibility – not merely to Americans but to others as well. The challenge of Soviet expansionism provided a litmus test for the

²³² Special Message to the Congress on Greece and Turkey, March 12, 1947, 177.

²³³ Morgenthau, *Scientific Man*, 202.

²³⁴ *Ibid.* 150.

responsible exercise of American power. Truman understood that democratic statecraft and American political culture required that American foreign policy must combine moral principles and interests. Principles and interests combined to compel the United States to contain Soviet power and influence. Interests dictated that the United States should seek to deny the Soviets the ability to develop their own nuclear arsenal. Principles, however, dictated that the United States would not abuse its nuclear monopoly: there would be no pre-emptive attack on the Soviet Union – it would be simply un-American.²³⁵ Interests, too, might have dictated that the United States adopt a wholly cynical view of power politics where power and force were the only considerations. Instead, Truman opted for a responsible exercise of American power, fully aware that to renounce power was utopian and irresponsible, maintaining an abiding Wilsonian belief in “the continued vitality of a progressive world society.”

²³⁵ See Russell D. Buhite and William Christopher Hamel, “War for Peace: The Question of an American Preventive War Against the Soviet Union,” *Diplomatic History* 14:3 (1990): 367-84.

CHAPTER 5

Dirty Hands? NSC 68, Responsible Power, and Moral Compromise

Safety from external danger is the most powerful director of national conduct. Even the most ardent love of liberty will, after a time, give way to its dictates. The violent destruction of life and property incident to war, the continual effort and alarm attendant on a state of continual danger, will compel nations the most attached to liberty to resort for repose and security to institutions which have a tendency to destroy their civil and political rights. To be more safe, they at length become more willing to run the risk of being less free.

- Alexander Hamilton, *The Federalist*, No. 8

It has long been a grave question whether any government not too strong for the liberties of its people, can be strong enough to maintain its liberties in emergencies.

- Abraham Lincoln

I. Introduction

The Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan had relied on politico-economic means to rejuvenate and restore morale in Western Europe and to contain Soviet power. The Truman Doctrine, although “universal” in the scope of its proclamation, was quite specifically targeted at Greece and Turkey. Its underlying logic, however, was quickly extended to Western Europe. If the defence of Greece and Turkey was deemed vital to American interests and security, was the defence of Western Europe not more so? The Truman Administration moved decisively to rebuild Europe’s political economy (in America’s image), encouraged European integration, and extended security guarantees through the North Atlantic Alliance; the United States was now a Euro-Atlantic power.

Through all this Truman sought a balanced strategy to contain Soviet power, one that would not overburden or unbalance the American economy through massive spending on rearming the United States and its allies. Truman, committed to economizing, fiscal conservatism, and a balanced budget, was determined not to allow military spending to exceed \$14 billion.²³⁶

Events in late 1949 and early 1950 served to overturn the mood of quiet confidence that had surrounded American policymakers. With mounting anxiety they witnessed the Soviet blockade of West Berlin, the violent Communist coup in Prague, Mao ZeDong's victory in the Chinese civil war, the conviction of former State Department official Alger Hiss as a Communist spy, evidence of Soviet espionage in the Manhattan Project, and the successful detonation of a Soviet nuclear device. The advantage of diplomatic and political initiative now appeared to be on the side of the Kremlin, and appeared to portend a major shift in the global balance of power. Thus, by 1950 the stakes of the Cold War had been raised immeasurably, such that it prompted the urbane Robert A. Lovett, Deputy Secretary of Defense and a prominent "wise man" to declare:

We must realize that we are now in a mortal conflict; that we are now in a war worse than any we have ever experienced. Just because there is not much shooting as yet does not mean we are in a cold war. It is not a cold war; it is a hot war. The only difference between this and previous hot wars is that death comes more slowly and in a different fashion.²³⁷

²³⁶ Annual Budget Message to the Congress, Fiscal Year 1950, 10 January, 1949, *PPUS:HST*, 1949, 56.

²³⁷ Report of the Meeting of the State-Defense Policy Review Group, March 16, 1950, *FRUS*, 1950, 1: 197.

Fear of the Soviets, especially their possession of nuclear weapons, now permeated the ranks of American policymakers. Dean Acheson, now Secretary of State, was convinced that Truman's approach, which favoured the primacy of economic means of containment over military ones, was no longer tenable. Acheson found an ally in Paul H. Nitze, who replaced George Kennan as director of the State Department's Policy Planning Staff. Under Acheson, Kennan no longer enjoyed the privileged position he held under General Marshall. Kennan, susceptible as he was to alarmist rhetoric, believed that the Soviets constituted an economic and political, rather than an immediate military threat to the United States.²³⁸ Kennan's position and attitude towards the Soviets did not sit well with his new boss, who was convinced of the need for greater military preparedness and firmer countermeasures. Thus, when Truman ordered a comprehensive review of American strategy and national security policy, Acheson picked Nitze to head the project while Kennan was dispatched on a fact-finding tour of South America.²³⁹

Nitze's efforts culminated in the drafting of NSC 68, arguably the most important and controversial American policy paper of the Cold War period.²⁴⁰ NSC 68 called for a larger arsenal of nuclear weapons, stronger conventional military forces, additional economic and military assistance to American allies around the world, as well as new programs for civil defence and psychological warfare. In its tone, the document was ideologically charged; it utilized "dramatic, even sinister language" to characterize the

²³⁸ See NSC 20/4, 23 November, 1948, in *FRUS*, 1948, 1: 663-69; and Kennan, *Memoirs*, 1: 406-14.

²³⁹ Truman to Acheson, 31 January, 1950, *FRUS*, 1950, 1: 141-42; and Isaacson and Thomas, *Wise Men*, 490.

²⁴⁰ See Paul H. Nitze, *From Hiroshima to Glasnost: At the Center of Decision* (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1989), 93-100.

conflict with the Soviets.²⁴¹ Quite apart from the geopolitical aspect of the Cold War, NSC 68 focused on the conflict in the realm of ideas and values. The geopolitical element of the Cold War although never entirely absent, was deprecated – the national interest was defined not in terms of power, but rather in moral terms. It attempted to fit strategies into a framework of moral standards that would be appropriate for the conduct of American foreign relations in the Cold War. This chapter examines the chosen strategy outlined by Nitze and his fellow policymakers to wage the Cold War against the Soviets and focuses on the moral problems they encountered in attempting to reconcile means and ends.

II. NSC 68 and the Language of Moral Discourse

As a realist, Dean Acheson was aware that “the language of moral discourse – colored as it is apt to be at one end of the spectrum with fervor and at the other with self-righteousness – is more likely to obscure than clarify our discussions.”²⁴² Like Kennan, Acheson was worried that simplistic moral arguments could lead to dangerous and flawed conclusions. However, Acheson was himself more than willing to match his opponents’ moral rhetoric with his own. Acheson and Kennan clashed over the language of the Truman Doctrine; Acheson won. By resorting to a universalistic argument framed in moral terms, Acheson succeeded in prodding a reluctant Congress and the American

²⁴¹ Cathal J. Nolan, *Principled Diplomacy: Security and Rights in U.S. Foreign Policy* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1993), 104. Acheson later recalled that the purpose of NSC 68 was to “so bludgeon the mind of ‘top government’ that not only could the President make a decision but that the decision could be carried out.” Acheson, *Present at the Creation*, 374–75.

²⁴² Dean G. Acheson, *Power and Diplomacy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1958), 108.

people into providing aid to Greece and Turkey, and then to Western Europe. Years later, Acheson remained characteristically blunt and unapologetic about his choice of tactics:

The task of a public officer seeking to explain and gain support for a major policy is not that of the writer of a doctoral thesis. Qualifications must give way to simplicity of statement, nicety and nuance to bluntness, almost brutality, in carrying home a point... If we made our points clearer than truth, we did not differ from most other educators and could hardly do otherwise.²⁴³

In Nitze, Acheson recognized a kindred spirit who valued making an issue “clearer than truth” rather than couching it in flowery and dense prose and philosophical intuition, as Kennan was wont to. Acheson recalled with fondness that Nitze was “a joy to work with because of his clear, incisive mind.”²⁴⁴ As Michael Hogan points out, “every bone in Nitze’s body ached with suspicion of the Soviet Union.”²⁴⁵ Nitze saw no difference between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany; he perceived Stalin as another Hitler. His conflation of Communism and Nazism was not unusual; indeed it was prevalent at the time. Liberals and conservatives united to propound, expound, and just plain pound on the evils of totalitarianism; they viewed Communism and Nazism as being the evil twins of totalitarianism. Thus, it was relatively easy for American intellectuals to make a transition from an anti-fascist crusade to one against Communism – anti-totalitarianism quickly meant anti-Communism. Eric Fromm’s *Escape from Freedom* was published in 1941, and was widely read in American intellectual circles. So too was the Austrian economist Friedrich von Hayek’s polemic on *The Road to Serfdom*. Yale political scientist Harold Laswell wrote extensively on the garrison state. In Britain,

²⁴³ Acheson, *Present at the Creation*, 375.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 373.

²⁴⁵ Hogan, *Cross of Iron*, 294.

George Orwell wrote two scathing works denouncing totalitarianism, *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Hannah Arendt, a refugee from the Nazis like Fromm, published her groundbreaking and controversial study, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* in 1951.²⁴⁶

The spirit of anti-totalitarianism suffused NSC 68. Nitze got straight to the heart of the matter – the Soviet Union was motivated by “a new fanatic faith, antithetical to our own” and it was seeking to “impose its absolute authority over the rest of the world.” The United States, according to the document, represented the principal “bulwark of opposition” to the Soviet bid for world mastery.²⁴⁷ George Kennan had stated that in order to “avoid destruction [the United States] need only measure up to its *best traditions* and prove itself worthy of preservation as a great nation.”²⁴⁸ Thus, it was not for nothing that a section of NSC 68 was dedicated to an affirmation of the fundamental purpose of the Republic: “to assure the integrity and vitality of our free society, which is founded upon the dignity and worth of the individual.”²⁴⁹ Despite the perceived hardheaded “realism” of NSC 68, the document made a conscious and deliberate effort to connect with the tradition of American exceptionalism. Those fundamental values would serve as a bond, to use Edmund Burke’s phrase, “between those who are living, those who are

²⁴⁶ Eric Fromm, *Escape from Freedom* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1941); Friedrich A. von Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1944); Harold D. Lasswell, “Sino-Japanese Crisis: The Garrison State versus the Civilian State,” *The China Quarterly* 11 (Fall 1937): 643–49; idem, “The Garrison State,” *American Journal of Sociology* 46 (January 1941): 455–68; idem, “The Garrison State Specialists on Violence,” in Lasswell, *The Analysis of Political Behaviour: An Empirical Approach* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1947), 146–57. George Orwell, *Animal Farm* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1946); idem, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, [1949] 1990); Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace, [1951] 1979). See also Pells, *The Liberal Mind*, 84–91; Michael J. Sherry, *In the Shadow of War: The United States Since the 1930s* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995), 191; and George H. Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America, Since 1945* (New York: Basic Books, 1976), 4–9.

²⁴⁷ NSC 68: United States Objectives and Program for National Security, April 14, 1950, *FRUS*, 1950, 1: 237.

²⁴⁸ Kennan, “Sources of Soviet Conduct,” 582. Emphasis added.

²⁴⁹ NSC 68, 238.

dead, and those who are to be born.”²⁵⁰ The appeal to fundamental moral purposes represented a deep and sophisticated understanding of the wellsprings of America’s actions abroad. As Henry Kissinger points out, the United States could not “have sustained four decades of gruelling exertion on behalf of a policy which did not reflect its deepest values and ideals.”²⁵¹

NSC 68 stated that the underlying basis of the Cold War was “the basic conflict between the idea of freedom under a government of laws, and the idea of slavery under the grim oligarchy of the Kremlin.”²⁵² The authors of NSC 68 were unequivocal – there was simply to be no moral equivalence between the two antagonists. What they highlighted was the moral distinction between the United States and the Soviet Union. Yes, NSC 68 operated on a binary level and rendered a moral indictment on the Soviet Union, and the question that critics of NSC 68 and American foreign policy needed to address is whether the epithet “slave state” has any validity. For behind the conflict between the “free society” and the “slave state” was a far more comprehensive historical conflict between the Individual and the Collective. It was a conflict between two concepts of politics that have vied for the minds of men since the time of the pre-Socratics. On one side of this conflict stood the likes of Plato, Rousseau, and Lenin, with Locke, Burke, and Jefferson arrayed on the other. It was a question of what constituted the “best regime,” and what were to be its relations to the human dignity and worth of the individual. Who in essence, is to decide what is good, just, and true? Man or the state, the individual or the collective?

²⁵⁰ Burke, *Reflections*, 85.

²⁵¹ Kissinger, *Diplomacy*, 462.

²⁵² NSC 68, 239.

III. Cold War Rhetoric as Moral Persuasion? The Power of Binary Logic

The authors of NSC 68 waded into this epic conflict by calling Soviet rule by its true name: totalitarian slavery. The free society, the authors asserted, in terms which echoed the Kantian categorical imperative, “values the individual as an end in himself.”²⁵³ NSC 68 defined the ends of the free society in strictly limited and liberal terms. The free society, it asserted, strives to preserve and balance the rights of the individual against his or her fellow citizens, the rights of the minority against the majority, and the rights of the citizenry against the power of the state. In a free society founded upon “the dignity and worth of the individual,” he or she possesses the maximal autonomy to pursue “happiness” however it is defined and in whatever fashion, subject only to the limitations and responsibilities imposed by the concept of negative freedom. “The free society does not fear it, it welcomes diversity. It derives its strength from its hospitality even to antipathetic ideas. It is a market for the free trade of ideas, secure in its faith that men will take the best wares, and grow to a fuller and better realization of their powers in exercising their choice.”²⁵⁴ NSC 68’s peroration on the free society was a classic statement on the liberal “night watchman state,” where the state functions “to create and maintain an environment in which the every individual has the opportunity to realize his creative powers.”²⁵⁵ Consciously or not, NSC 68’s peroration on the free society recalls Pericles’ defence of another free society:

Our form of government does not enter into rivalry with the institution of others. We do not copy our neighbours, but

²⁵³ Ibid., 239.

²⁵⁴ Ibid. 239

²⁵⁵ Ibid. 239

we are an example to them.... There is no exclusiveness in our public life, and in our private intercourse we are not suspicious of one another, nor angry with our neighbour if he does what he likes; we do not put on sour looks at him, which, though harmless, are not pleasant. While we are thus unconstrained in our private intercourse, a spirit of reverence pervades our public acts; we are prevented from doing wrong by respect for the authorities and for the law, having an especial regard to those which are ordained for the protection of the injured as well as those unwritten laws which bring upon the transgressor of them the reprobation of the general sentiment.²⁵⁶

Following from the binary logic of NSC 68, the nature of the free society was juxtaposed with the situation that existed behind the Iron Curtain. There, Soviet totalitarianism far surpassed the cruelty of the Tsarist autocracy, which it supplanted. The totalitarian nature of Soviet rule, like its Nazi twin, could not permit even “sleeping dogs” to lie. As Bernard Crick indicates, the dictates of Communist “harmony” or “class solidarity” mean that:

[N]ot merely the machinery of government and the economic institutions of society, but also education, art, even domesticity and private affection, all these, both in work and leisure, are part of a completely interrelated system, all are forces which must be accountable to the ideology. To leave any of these uncontrolled would be, in a practical sense, to leave dangerous lacunae of liberty and means of personal escape from complete dedication to public purposes.²⁵⁷

In such a totalitarian system, the authors of NSC 68 noted, the individual “finds and can only find the meaning of his existence in serving the ends of the system.”²⁵⁸ NSC 68 excoriated Soviet rule as an exercise in Procrustean bed-building – what the conservative

²⁵⁶ Thucydides, *History*, II. 37-38.

²⁵⁷ Bernard Crick, *In Defence of Politics*, 2d ed, rev. and enl. (Hammondsworth, England: Penguin, 1964), 40.

²⁵⁸ NSC 68, 239.

philosopher Michael Oakeshott called “the assimilation of politics to engineering”²⁵⁹ – and exposed the utter moral bankruptcy of the Soviet system. Lenin and Stalin had long since extirpated whatever humanistic impulses Karl Marx might have infused into his theory. Lenin, like Robespierre before him, had started out preaching freedom – the Communists had wrapped themselves in the emancipatory banner of Enlightenment thought. However, Lenin and his cadres proved to be no better than the Jacobins: the so-called champions of freedom and liberty became tyrants in their turn. In the “X” article, Kennan had stated that “[the Communists] probably did not seek absolutism for its own sake. They doubtless believed – and found it easy to believe – that they alone knew what was good for society and that they would accomplish that good once their power was secure and unchallengeable.”²⁶⁰ That, of course, could provide little comfort to those living behind the Iron Curtain under Soviet rule.

Convinced of the justice of their ends and the infallibility of their judgment, the Communists proceeded to rid society of its “inner contradictions,” to use the Marxist vernacular. Terror, ruthlessly and judiciously applied, would be used to achieve a society devoid of any inner contradictions. Terror, was as a matter of fact an intrinsic part of the totalitarian system – the people had to be forced to be “free” whether they wanted to or not. In the “X” article, Kennan asserted that the Soviet leadership “placed far down on the scale of operational priorities the comfort and happiness of the peoples entrusted to their care.”²⁶¹ However, the point of the matter lies in the fact that Soviet leaders were operating on a completely different paradigm in the matter of trusteeship. They were

²⁵⁹ Michael Oakeshott, *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1962), 4.

²⁶⁰ Kennan, “Sources of Soviet Conduct,” 569.

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 569.

trustees not of the welfare of the people, but of *The Idea*. Furthermore, “comfort” and “happiness” could only be achieved in the context of a socialist system; to assert otherwise was *ipso facto* heresy and treason, punishable by a stint in Siberia or worse. The sheer perversity of the totalitarian Soviet idea is evident in its ability to coerce the people into believing that true freedom lay in a condition of complete servitude to the system and its purported ends. The practical consequence of the slave state was not the forging of a New Man – *Homo Sovieticus* – in the crucible of a classless utopia, but individuals who “become old before their time and must be considered as human casualties to the demands of dictatorship.”²⁶²

The bourgeois state, according to Marx, contains “inner contradictions,” but he failed to understand that inner contradictions are precisely what the free society is all about. Indeed, to speak of a free society devoid of inner contradictions would in essence be a contradiction in terms. For the totalitarian mindset, those inner contradictions are indicative of weakness, decadence, and injustice – a scheme lacking any rational order, and must hence be eradicated in order to clear the path to achieving *The Goal*. For the free society, however, there is no end to “history.”²⁶³ It does not offer perfection, utopia, or a Collective of its own. For the authors of NSC 68, the free society represented a constant “work-in-progress”: “For the free society there is never total victory, since freedom and democracy are never wholly attained, are always in the process of being attained.”²⁶⁴ Edmund Burke, observing events in revolutionary France, saw through what Oakeshott called “the myth of rationalist politics” and warned that:

²⁶² *Ibid.*, 577.

²⁶³ Cf. Francis Fukuyama, “The End of History?” *The National Interest* 16 (Spring 1989): 3–18.

²⁶⁴ NSC 68, 263.

It is better to cherish virtue and humanity by leaving much to free will, even with some loss to the object, than to attempt to make men mere machines and instruments of a political benevolence. The whole world will gain by a liberty without which virtue cannot exist.²⁶⁵

The false idealist promises ideals and their realization. He counsels perfection, but neglects the fact that perfection implies and demands uniformity and conformity. The true idealist, one who understands the importance of ideals in the moral lives of both individuals and states, recognizes that ideals are by definition transcendent.²⁶⁶

IV. Duties Within and Beyond Borders Revisited

Transcendental idealism - the tradition of American exceptionalism - also suffused NSC 68. It kept alive the Founding Fathers' vision of the United States as a noble experiment in, and a beacon of, liberty. The emphasis on America's fundamental values and purpose was perceived as the long-term key to victory in the Cold War. The preservation of those values was viewed as critical in thwarting Soviet ambitions: "It is only by practical affirmation, abroad as well as at home, of our essential values, that we can preserve our own integrity, in which lies the real frustration of the Kremlin design."²⁶⁷ In his celebrated July 4 Address in 1821, John Quincy Adams had warned against the dangers of a crusading spirit that sought out "monsters to destroy." Clearly, however, America's geopolitical circumstances had altered considerably since Adams' time. The justification for American action, as set forth in NSC 68, was not that it was sallying forth "in search of monsters to destroy," but rather that quite unwillingly, it had

²⁶⁵ Oakeshott, *Rationalism in Politics*, 4; Burke, *Reflections*, 91.

²⁶⁶ See Kissinger, *A World Restored*, 316-17.

²⁶⁷ NSC 68, 241.

to fend-off “monsters” seeking to undermine the Republic and all it stood for; the United States was acting in self-defence. Too much had changed in the world; it was a practical impossibility to postulate a clear delineation of the foreign and domestic spheres and rely on an insular policy, as Adams had sought to do.

By linking the integrity of American society with the fate of the “free world,” the Truman Doctrine readjusted the delineation between the foreign and domestic spheres. It had reconceptualized America’s duties within and beyond its borders. The policy of containment was the supreme and final rejection of a policy of isolationism for the United States. The Truman Doctrine allowed for a vastly increased area of overlay between the foreign and domestic spheres – between American interests ideals on the one hand, and the international common good, conceived as a stable international system comprised of free and independent states and based on “order and justice,” on the other.²⁶⁸ It was within this area of overlay that the concept of responsible American power was forged. The concept was a recognition that the United States possessed interests, ideals, and duties, and that they could coexist, if sometimes only uneasily. It reflected the position that power, if it was to be exercised in a responsible manner, requires a purpose. Power needed to be fused with principles. It was also a reflection of the interrelationship of the two facets of responsible power. On the one hand, there existed the obligation and interest of the United States in ensuring the security of the Republic and fulfilling its duty to the American people and their fundamental values. On the other hand, the United States had to bear the responsibility of maintaining the international system against

²⁶⁸ NSC 68, 241.

Soviet predations. America's external responsibilities were borne as a result of a combination of obligation and necessity.

In the conflict between the free society and the slave state, the United States found itself faced with a practical and moral conundrum. The free society, the authors of NSC 68 conceded, "is limited in its choice of means to achieve its ends" – especially with regard to the use of force.²⁶⁹ They recognized that the threat or the actual use of force could undermine the logical and moral coherence of NSC 68's peroration on the values and ends of the free society. NSC 68 concluded that the resort to force represented "a difficult and dangerous act for a free society," since compulsion represented a negation of liberty and challenged the fundamental *raison d'être* of any society so constituted. Nevertheless, the authors of NSC 68 maintained that the use of force was a necessary evil, but it was justified when the Republic was *in extremis*:

The act is permissible only when one individual or groups of individuals within it threaten the basic rights of other individuals or when another society seeks to impose its will upon it.²⁷⁰

In a free society, the resort to the use of force must not merely be *justified*, it must be also be perceived to be *just*: "the act must commend itself to the overwhelming majority as an inescapable exception to the idea of freedom."²⁷¹ This simply served to underscore the perennial difficulty of conducting foreign policy in a democracy, especially in the case of one so self-conscious of its moral imperatives. However, the authors of NSC 68 understood well enough that the long-term success of containment required the continued support of the American people. To that end, a consensus had to be created, public

²⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 242.

opinion cultivated and its inherent vicissitude tempered. This problem was by no means new. Writing a century before, Alexis de Tocqueville observed that:

Foreign politics demand scarcely any of those qualities which are peculiar to a democracy; they require, on the contrary, the perfect use of almost all in which it is deficient.... It cannot combine its measures with secrecy or await their consequences with patience. Those are qualities which more especially belong to an individual or an aristocracy; and they are precisely the qualities by which a nation, like an individual, attains a dominant position.²⁷²

V. Creating a Moral Framework: The Reconciling of Means and Ends

American policymakers were faced with an additional dilemma: if the free society was constrained in its choice of means to achieve its ends, then the Soviet Union felt no such restrictions. Thus, in the conflict between the Kremlin's "design" and America's "purpose," the authors of NSC 68 argued that that the former "is able to select whatever means are expedient... It can make the best of several possible worlds, conducting the struggle on those levels where it considers it profitable."²⁷³ What was the United States going to do in such circumstances, given both the nature of the conflict and the nature of its adversary? In *The Prince*, Machiavelli captured perfectly the moral dilemma facing American policymakers:

A man who wishes to make a profession of goodness in everything must necessarily come to grief among so many who are not good. Therefore it is necessary for a prince, who wishes to maintain himself, to learn how not to be good, and to use this knowledge and not use it, according to the necessity of the case.²⁷⁴

²⁷⁰ Ibid., 243.

²⁷¹ Ibid., 243.

²⁷² Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, I: 234.

²⁷³ NSC 68, 243.

²⁷⁴ Machiavelli. *The Prince*. chap. 15.

Could the United States successfully wage the Cold War and still retain its soul? To help them come to grips with this dilemma, the authors of NSC 68 turned to Alexander Hamilton. In *The Federalist* No. 28, Hamilton argued forcefully that “the idea of governing at all times by the simple force of law has no place but in the reveries of those political doctors whose sagacity disdains the admonition of experimental instruction.” He maintained that situations would surely arise where “there can be no remedy but force.”²⁷⁵ When, not if, that occurred, Hamilton maintained that “the means to be employed must be proportional to the extent of the mischief.”

Even though the authors of NSC 68 availed themselves of Hamilton’s wisdom, he was not the originator of the concept of “proportionality.” In turning to the concept of proportionality, the authors of NSC 68 placed themselves in the just war tradition that dates back to medieval Catholic thinkers.²⁷⁶ It is through the use of proportionality and the associated doctrine of “double effect” that we can analyze the moral approach adopted by NSC 68 in a more critical manner. John Lewis Gaddis has described NSC 68 as “the most morally self-conscious state paper of the era – but one that wound up justifying, in the end, amoral policies.”²⁷⁷ Is Gaddis correct? Is there a great disconnect between the professed morality of American purpose stated so eloquently and the so-called justification of “amoral policies?” Certainly Gaddis has had the benefit of hindsight to pass judgment on NSC 68, but whether it can be truly judged as amoral or otherwise

²⁷⁵ Cf. Machiavelli, *The Prince*, chap. 18: “There are two methods of fighting, the one by law, the other by force: the first method is that of man, the second of beasts; but as the first method is often insufficient, one must have recourse to the second.”

²⁷⁶ See Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars*.

one has to understand the moral approach of the authors of NSC 68. An important obstacle to understanding NSC 68 is the tendency to look at the document retroactively either through realist or liberal “lenses” and to attempt to impose on it a rigorous theoretical orthodoxy when no such thing exists. Thus, to describe NSC 68 as a singularly realist (or even liberal) conception of international politics misses the mark completely. Looking at NSC 68 through theoretical lenses can only lead us to a dead end. There is the ever-present danger that in reading backwards, theory causes us to see and discover “facts” because the theory tells us what we need to look for. This can only complicate and distort the inquiry. NSC 68, like other instances of policymaking, was an exercise in practical wisdom. NSC 68 was an exercise in *real* policymaking, attempting to achieve a delicate point of balance between means and ends, intentions and consequences, and the “good” foreign policy and the “successful” or “effective” foreign policy.

In international politics and statecraft, the tension that exists between the “is” and the “ought” cannot be simply made to disappear by the mere invocation of some Kantian postulate. Clearly, statesmen and policymakers contemplating positive political action ought to attempt to relate the use of power or force as *means* to the *ends* of policy - the hallmark of responsible statecraft. In the case of NSC 68 and containment, American statesmen and policymakers had to consider American objectives – the preservation of the Republic and its values – as the *ends* as well as *effects* of responsible political action. This form of political *and* moral deliberation is in accord with the principles of proportionality and double effect. In this manner, statesmen and policymakers will

²⁷⁷ John Lewis Gaddis, “Morality and the American Cold War Experience,” in *Ethics and Statecraft: The Moral Dimension of International Affairs*, ed. Cathal J. Nolan (Westport, Conn. and London: Praeger, 1995), 178.

understand that the “preservation of values” and the “preservation of the state” are both effects of their actions, and they must count the cost of one effect on the other. Thus, the authors of NSC 68 were faced with the question of how much preserving the values and ideals of the United States – keeping its hands “clean” and avoiding less-than-virtuous means – was worth jeopardizing the security of the Republic. Similarly, they were faced with the question of how much evil is it permissible to commit in order to preserve the security and integrity of the Republic, at the cost of sacrificing the values of the free society. In the end, however, the authors of NSC 68 concluded that:

Our free society, confronted by a threat to its basic values, naturally will take such action, including the use of military force, as may be required to protect those values. The integrity of our system will not be jeopardized by any measure, covert or overt, violent or non-violent, which serve the purposes of frustrating the Kremlin design, nor does the necessity of conducting ourselves so as to affirm our values in actions as well as in words forbid such measures, providing only they are appropriately calculated to that end and are not so excessive or misdirected as to make enemies of the people instead of the evil men who have enslaved them.²⁷⁸

Here then, was the admission by the authors of NSC 68 that the United States would have to possess “dirty hands.” In the struggle against the Kremlin’s “design,” America would have to become Machiavelli’s prince and “learn how not to be good.” What are we to make of all this? Is it a justification of means by ends, and a no holds barred struggle with the Soviet Union?²⁷⁹ The authors of NSC 68 did not envisage the Cold War as a completely unfettered struggle. They did seek an increase in the military budget to meet the Soviet challenge – what critics have taken to be an indication of the

²⁷⁸ NSC 68, 244.

militarization of containment. They were mindful of Walter Lippmann's call to balance commitments with resources. Thus, available resources had to be increased to match expanded American commitments around the world. Yet, if containment was militarized, the authors of NSC 68 sought to avoid a direct military conflict with the Soviet Union. Clearly a war between two nuclear powers would be nothing short of cataclysmic. However, American policymakers had a further quintessentially American reason for avoiding war – it would leave the Soviet Union unconverted and the “fundamental conflict” unresolved²⁸⁰:

Resort to war is not only a last resort for a free society, but it is also an act which cannot definitively end the fundamental conflict in the realm of ideas... Military victory alone would only partially and perhaps only temporarily affect the fundamental conflict, for although the ability of the Kremlin to threaten our security might be for a time delayed, the resurgence of totalitarian forces and the re-establishment of the Soviet system or its equivalent would not be long delayed unless great progress were made in the fundamental conflict.²⁸¹

It is through the contextualization of this desire to avoid war, to confront the Soviet Union by means short of war – ends and effects derivable from the principles of proportionality and double effect – that we can appreciate NSC 68's advocacy of the “new strategy of the cold war.”²⁸²

In his study of the moral dilemmas associated with the problem of dirty hands, the political philosopher Michael Walzer noted that responsible political action sometimes

²⁷⁹ See Gaddis, “Morality and the American Cold War Experience,” 180.

²⁸⁰ See Kissinger, *Diplomacy*, 463.

²⁸¹ NSC 68, 243.

²⁸² *Ibid.*, 242.

requires the statesman to dirty his hands.²⁸³ Walzer highlights the moral dilemma faced by statesmen when they are forced into some form of moral compromise, when they have to reconcile the “good” policy with the “successful” policy. He indicates that those who would seek to do good, “can do no good themselves unless they win the struggle, which they are unlikely to do unless they are willing and able to use the necessary means. So we are suspicious even of the best of winners.”²⁸⁴ So it is with NSC 68 – its authors understood that absolutely no good could come from the defeat of the United States at the hands of the Soviet Union in the fundamental conflict between them. They also understood that in order to avoid defeat the United States would have to make moral compromises, and they were prepared to dirty their hands and use the “necessary means” in order to win. To that extent, the good policy was made subordinate to the dictates of the successful policy. Walzer himself contends that once the statesman decides to dirty his hands, he must “do bad things well. There is no reward for doing bad things badly, though they are done with the best of intentions.”²⁸⁵ The concept of dirty hands may be distasteful, but it is not amoral.²⁸⁶ Walzer uses the concept to create a more complex understanding of political morality and responsible action, which refutes “absolutism without denying the reality of the moral dilemma.”²⁸⁷

Does the concept of dirty hands absolve the statesman and policymaker from any or all moral responsibility? The answer is clearly no; there are limits even to dirty hands. Sometimes, in the pursuit of a higher goal the responsible and moral thing to do is to

²⁸³ Walzer, “Dirty Hands,” 160-180.

²⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 164.

²⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 176.

²⁸⁶ Rosenthal, *Righteous Realists*, p. 64.

²⁸⁷ Walzer, “Political Action,” p. 162.

engage in less-than-virtuous activity - to use the methods of the beast. Sometimes, the statesman may be required to do things – or to tolerate things – that would be regarded as unacceptable or even wicked, if it were done in private life. The Italian statesman, Conte Camillo Cavour once suggested that “if we had done for ourselves the things we are doing for Italy, we should be great rascals.”²⁸⁸ However, even while allowing for dirty hands, the dirt should not be “picked up too far from the values the hands were meant to protect.”²⁸⁹ Otherwise it would be too easy to become the beast. In addition, Walzer reminds us that even as we accept the moral statesman and his dirty hands, we must remain “suspicious.” In the case of NSC 68 we are more than merely suspicious. Hindsight has provided us with a list of the “necessary means” adopted by the United States in the Cold War – proxy wars, coups, assassinations, human rights abuses, and the support of unsavoury authoritarian regimes. These are not means that causes one to flush with pride.

Thus, we come to the question of whether or not American policymakers failed to anticipate the danger that the United States, in its zeal to defeat the Soviet Union, might itself become the enemy of the free society. The answer is yes and no. Yes, they understood that the Cold War struggle would likely require the use of unsavoury means, and they were prepared for that. They did understand that this might betray a victory, but this was balanced by the genuine belief that the ultimate triumph of the values and ideals of the free society would vindicate them. On the other hand it must also be said that no, they failed to anticipate the full virulence of McCarthy’s anti-Communist inquisition, the

²⁸⁸ George Macauley Trevelyan, *The Making of Modern Italy* (London: Longmans, Greens, [1911] 1948), 23.

²⁸⁹ Rosenthal, *Righteous Realists*, p. 64.

support of right-wing dictatorships, and the tragedy of Vietnam. However, what it does highlight is the inherent difficulty of attempting to resolve complex moral problems with any degree of certainty. Walzer points out that “political action is so uncertain that politicians necessarily take moral as well as political risks, committing crimes that they think ought to be committed. They override the rules without ever being certain that they have found the best way to the results they hope to achieve.”²⁹⁰ The thoughts of Nitze and his fellow policymakers were set down in cold hard type print. Was this, however, representative of their overall attitude toward the normative element in American statecraft? No. They understood that they had only *outlined* a strategy, and not created a detailed blueprint for action. These were pragmatic men who understood that the details would have to depend on prevailing circumstances and American statesman had to exercise prudence and discretionary judgment on *an ad hoc* basis. What was suitable under a particular set of circumstances might not be appropriate under another. Such nuance was sacrificed, unfortunately, in the haste to make things “clearer than truth.”

The exercise of responsible power thus demands that the statesman exercise judgment – to evaluate the means, ends, and consequences of political action in the light of prevailing conditions, with imperfect knowledge, to make difficult moral choices, and to act. Statesmen encounter moral risks in all their actions; but to eliminate those risks would mean that they cease to act. There is then, a mixed sense of tragedy and nobility when individuals acts even in the face of doubt, having been saddled with the awesome responsibility of sorting out competing and conflicting moral principles and having to make difficult choices between them. This sense of tragedy, Reinhold Niebuhr argued,

“is constituted by a conscious choice of evil for the sake of good. If men or nations do evil in a good cause; if they cover themselves with guilt in order to fulfil some high responsibility; or if they sacrifice some high values for a higher or equal one they make a tragic choice.”²⁹¹

“A bad cause seldom fails to betray itself.” So wrote James Madison in *The Federalist* No. 41. For four decades the United States did sacrifice, in terms of both blood and treasure, in what George Kennan had described as “a test of the over-all worth of the United States as a nation among nation.” The leftist critics of American policy are correct in asserting that the United States derived considerable benefit from the Cold War. However, what cannot be ignored is that Americans sacrificed not merely for their own benefit and comfort but also for others, to ensure the “existence and persistence of the idea of freedom.”²⁹² In doing so, however, the rights of some peoples and states were occasionally sacrificed by the United States in the name of preserving those rights over the long term.²⁹³ Vietnam is often held to be the logical outcome of the militarization of containment purportedly advocated by NSC 68. The validity of a lineal causation between the Truman Doctrine, NSC 68, and the Vietnam war is open to question. Even so, Vietnam also paradoxically proved the truth of NSC 68. It challenged the “integrity” of the American system, called into question the validity of America’s “cause,” and shattered the post-war bipartisan foreign policy consensus. Yet was not the visceral reaction to Vietnam an instance of the free society at work? Pericles had said that in a

²⁹⁰ Walzer, “Political Action,” pp. 179-80.

²⁹¹ Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man: A Christian Interpretation*, vol. 2 (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1949), p. 284.

²⁹² “NSC 68,” p. 240.

²⁹³ Nolan, *Principled Diplomacy*, p. 105.

democracy, even if “few of us are originators, we are all sound judges of a policy.”²⁹⁴ Introspection, self-doubt, and self-criticism are the hallmarks of a free society, not that of the slave state. Measured by its own standards, the American leadership was subject to every creaturely foible, whereas the Soviet regime saw itself as infallible. Foreign policy is amoral or morally bankrupt when there is an absence of overarching or guiding principles governing political action. NSC 68 and subsequent American Cold War policy initiatives could never totally avoid moral scrutiny. The values, ideals and moral principles contained in NSC 68 were held as a mirror to American actions. The United States clearly did not and could not live-up to its transcendental ideals - but which nations can or has tried as much as America? The United States has often been branded as being hypocritical, but hypocrisy is a necessary correlate of any nations that attempts to be guided by moral principles.

²⁹⁴ Thucydides. *History*. II. §40.

CHAPTER 6

Conclusion: A Remembrance of things past

At the end of the Second World War, the United States along with its victorious allies were presented with the opportunity to create “a new order of things” that would bring peace and stability to the international system and thus prevent a recurrence of the tragedies that culminated in two global wars. A truly global and progressive international system did not come to pass; wartime amity gave way to the Cold War when American statesmen perceived a Soviet threat of sufficient magnitude to upset the global balance of power and threaten American national security interests. Faced with this perceived threat, the United States under the leadership of Harry Truman reconfigured its duties within and beyond its borders and sought to exercise responsible power in the postwar period. In doing so, American statesmen were confronted with the dilemma of how to defend their nation from what appeared to be a mortal threat without adopting the methods of its adversary, and thereby compromising the very ideals and values that comprised America’s *raison d’être*. They were able to avoid this through their prudent assessment of the situation facing them and creating policies that fit the circumstances. The problem that confronted American statesmen in the postwar period was not new – the dilemmas generated by the competing claims of security and morality are evident in Thucydides’ account of the Peloponnesian War written over 2 400 years ago and they are present even today.

Ethical statecraft is inextricably connected to its practice; it is necessarily an applied ethics, not an abstract thought exercise concerning metaphysical moral theories. This paper has drawn its theoretical underpinnings from the casuistic tradition of moral

reasoning, which emphasizes the role of prudence, judgment, and the awareness of circumstances. It draws from an often-misunderstood view of realism regarding the role of morality in international politics. There are few subjects more fraught with tension than the role of morality in international politics. The international political sphere appears to be inhospitable to the melioration of morality. The international sphere, however, is not an unmitigated state of nature "red in tooth and claw." Statesmen, as moral agents, are the conduits through which moral principles enter into, and affect, international politics. Responsible and ethical statecraft is not about a heroic and senseless martyrdom; it is not the reckless pursuit of moral imperatives without regard to circumstances and consequences.

Moral principles are meant to guide the statesman's actions, but he must adjudicate between competing moral principles and claims within the context of the circumstances he faces. He must do the best he can given the circumstances. From this perspective, it is impossible to answer in the abstract or in *a priori* manner how much "evil" is to be committed or tolerated so that good (however it is conceived) may come about. Statecraft is an art, not a precise science. The moral decisions of statesmen are made within real world constraints of time and space, and judgments of those decisions cannot be adequately made in the abstract without a due appreciation of the prevailing circumstances. In this manner, whatever the statesman does will never satisfy the moral perfectionist; in the casuistic approach to political morality, there is little certainty and even less moral tidiness.

The United States, as a founded nation, has always perceived itself as possessing duties within and beyond borders. On the one hand, it continually seeks to fulfill the

dream of “a more perfect union,” and on the other hand to spread the blessings of liberty to all corners of the world. With the outbreak of the French Revolution, an opportunity presented itself to the fledgling republic to intervene on behalf of a “free people” threatened by conservative monarchical forces. Moral principles, argued Jefferson and Madison, required that American aid the French. Alexander Hamilton instead argued that given the circumstances prudence as well as responsible moral judgment required the nation to avoid conflict with the European powers. For over a century America’s isolationism from the quarrels of the Old World was elevated to the level of a moral principle, and for over a century national morality and national interest coincided to vindicate a policy of isolation from Europe’s troubles; it made eminent sense.

Changed circumstances – especially with regard to a change in the global balance of power – simply meant that what had been prudent and effective in the past was not likely to work under a different set of circumstances. What had worked for Washington, Hamilton, Jefferson, and Madison, was not likely to work for Truman. In the postwar period American statesmen understood that a return to isolationism was irresponsible and likely to be self-destructive. Changed international circumstances required active international engagement and the responsible exercise of America’s preponderant power. Once again there appeared to be a striking coincidence of national morality and national interests. The line delineating the domestic and international spheres was disappearing; the destruction of liberty abroad was inimical to both America’s values and its interests. American statesmen rose to the occasion of the Soviet challenge.

In creating the policy of containment, the Truman Doctrine, the Marshall Plan, and NSC 68, they sought to circumscribe Soviet power in a responsible fashion – one that

would avoid the outbreak of another global conflict and compromising cherished moral principles. This was a tall order that Truman and his colleagues set for themselves, and they succeeded to a remarkable degree. They sought to make the successful policy comport with the good policy. The dilemmas generated by the competing claims of security and morality can never be fully resolved, only meliorated through compromises. They understood that perfection was unattainable and an enemy of the good; thus, they attempted to do the best they could given the circumstances.

American statesmen did not deliberately set out to provoke the Soviets into conflict. They were acting in response to a perceived Soviet threat in the midst of changing circumstances. Even though they did not seek to provoke the Soviets, they understood that it would be the logical outcome of their actions. In this matter, they were faced with the classic security dilemma wherein actions deemed essential to promote the security of one party clashed with the security imperatives of the other. Americans would not and could not rely on Soviet entreaties of professed amity (which in any event were not really forthcoming). Prudence and a sense of responsibility required that Truman act to prevent a shift in the global balance of power that would threaten the security of the United States. To that end, the United States chose to break with the Soviets, dispensed economic and financial aid in amounts that had not been anticipated, established connections with foreign government in ways that had not been planned, and assumed unprecedented political and military commitments and responsibilities in parts of the world that had not been contemplated. Responsible statecraft was intended to serve both the national and international public good, which at minimum required the thwarting of Soviet ambitions to allow freedom to thrive at home and abroad.

Harry S. Truman, however, left office deeply unpopular in January 1953. American and UN intervention in Korea, originally conceived as a police action to defend South Korea from an armed attack from the North, got mired in stalemate and it quickly became "Truman's War." Truman was bloodied, but unbowed. In addressing the American people shortly before leaving office, Truman returned to the theme of the struggle between the free society and the slave state. Truman maintained that the slave state could not prevail over the free society: "As the free world grows stronger, more unified, more attractive to men on both sides of the Iron Curtain – and as the Soviet hopes for an easy expansion are blocked – then there will have to come a time of change in the Soviet world. Nobody can say for sure when that is going to be, or exactly how it will come about, whether by revolution, or trouble in the satellite states, or by a change in the Kremlin." The president had no doubt however that change would come: "I have a deep and abiding faith in the destiny of free men. With patience and courage, we shall some day move into a new era."²⁹⁵ Truman was vindicated. The "new era" is here: the Soviet Union now lies on the dust heap of history.

Five decades later, Truman ranks as one of the greatest presidents of the twentieth century, whose legacy is eagerly claimed by both Democrats and Republicans. Truman's internationalist legacy is as impressive as it is enduring. The North Atlantic Alliance is now in its sixth decade of existence, and it remains an essential element in American foreign relations and the bedrock of Atlanticism. The Alliance helped, as Truman hoped and maintained it would, keep the peace in Europe without ever firing a single shot in anger, and it has since expanded to include former members of the Soviet Bloc, Poland,

the Czech Republic, and Hungary. Historians and economists will continue to debate whether or to what extent the Marshall Plan actually contributed to the process of Western Europe's economic recovery. Whatever its purely economic merits may be, the Marshall Plan was a resounding political and psychological success. Morale and faith in the practices and institutions of democratic governance were restored in Western Europe, and European self-confidence bolstered. Marshall aid ensured that Europeans did not have to face the spectre of choosing between Communism and immiseration. The Marshall Plan continues to live on in the public imagination; from Sub-Saharan Africa to the Balkans, calls continue to be heard for new Marshall Plans to aid impoverished regions and peoples. The leniency and compassion shown to the defeated Germans and Japanese have been more than vindicated – Germany and Japan are stable, prosperous, democracies, and constructive members of the international community.

Truman's achievements appear all the greater given the enormity of the challenges that he faced. Certainty comes only with the benefit of hindsight: for American statesmen in the post-war period it was a question of sorting through imponderables and contemplating any number of uncertain outcomes. Born in the Gilded Age in rural America, Truman became president at a time when the nation had to confront the manifold problems and responsibilities of an industrialized and increasingly globalized age and the status of a superpower. *What* Truman and his associates did and *how* they did it reflected a quintessentially American form of statecraft. The United States had a lot to learn in the post-war period and it had to do so in a hurry. Lacking the grand imperial tradition of the European Great Powers and their affinity for *realpolitik*, the

²⁹⁵ *PPPUS: HST*, 1952-1953: 1201.

United States had to imbibe the hard lessons of powers relations and fuse it with American principles and ideals.

Truman did not possess the ruthlessness of a Bismarck, or the guile of a Talleyrand; he was thoroughly American – a common man possessed of uncommon decency and public virtue. A man of little formal education, Truman was nonetheless very well acquainted with history and political thought; he was, as Acheson described him, every inch a Yale man in the best sense of the word. There will always be those who mock, *sotto voce*, the idea of great individuals influencing the course of history. That debate is likely to go on and remain unresolved. Nonetheless, individuals and their choices and actions do matter. Truman gathered about him a group of remarkably talented individuals, the original best and brightest: Acheson. Marshall. Kennan. Averell Harriman, Charles Bohlen, John McCloy, Robert Lovett, Paul Nitze, Clark Clifford, among many others. If they had not been present at the creation, the postwar period would have been – for better or worse – very different. The perception of a Soviet threat would have in all likelihood evinced an American response sooner or later, even without Truman. When the United States would respond, and in what fashion is open to debate – although it is clear that as presidents, Henry Wallace or Robert Taft would have responded to the Soviet challenge very differently. Possibilities range from an appeasement and accommodation of Stalin, to a dangerous over-reaction and war. Counterfactual arguments, however, while constituting an intellectually stimulating exercise, distract us from what actually occurred. American statesmen in the postwar period perceived a Soviet threat and prudence required that they respond – the price of inaction was deemed too high.

American statesmen understood that a dangerous world requires military strength, but not militarism. The former was only prudent and responsible, while the latter was reckless and dangerous. They were prudent and pragmatic men who sought moderation in the policies they counselled, if not always in their rhetoric. American statesmen attempted to craft policies that were politically prudent and morally principled - ones that fit the circumstances they faced. Fighting for ideals, values, and moral principles was a worthy cause and a legitimate way of delineating the free society from the slave state. Moderation remained key, however, in ensuring that morality did not degenerate into moralism, moral absolutism, or extremism. Truman and his foreign policy team sought to hold the crucial centre against both the “yahoos” on the right and the “softies” on the left – the one would have the United States wage a holy war against the godless Soviets, while the other would ignore or appease them altogether.

Truman and his team understood the role and importance of political principles in the ethical conduct of statecraft. They included moral considerations in their deliberations but did not subordinate everything else to them. It was understood that there would be tension between the good policy and the successful policy; ideally they ought to be one and the same. Success was the goal but the good policy was always to be strived for; “good” and “success,” however, could not be considered in isolation from the prevailing circumstances. As pragmatic individuals, Truman and his colleagues understood this perfectly well. They crafted policies and conducted good and successful statecraft in the context of the circumstances they faced. As circumstances change so too must the approximation of what constitutes good and success. The ethical conduct of statecraft requires prudence and the ability to judge and to recognize which specific circumstances

require which specific obligations or principles. Could they have done better? Definitely. It is not too difficult to look back on the period with a sense of tragedy – not merely for the subsequent lives that were lost and the treasure spent on armaments, but in a more encompassing sense of “it is a pity that it had to happen that way.” Despite that, it is difficult to lay blame on Truman and his colleagues for the failure of those following them to use discretionary judgment regarding the circumstances they faced. What was tragic and unfortunate was that, as the Cold War became bureaucratized and routinized, nuance, insight, flexibility, and judgment gave way to orthodoxy and inertia.

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