Rethinking Atomic Diplomacy and the Origins of the Cold War

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This paper argues that the conflict between nuclear nationalist and nuclear internationalist discourses over atomic weapons policy was critical in the articulation of a new system of American power. The creation of the atomic bomb destroyed the Roosevelt's vision of a postwar world order while confronting United States (and Soviet) policymakers with alternatives that, before the bomb's use, only a handful of individuals had contemplated. The bomb remade the world. My argument is that the atomic bomb did not cause the Cold War, but without it, the Cold War could not have occurred.

INTRODUCTION

The creation of the atomic bomb destroyed the Rooseveltian vision of a postwar world order while confronting United States (and Soviet) policymakers with a new set of alternatives that, prior to the bomb's use, only a bare handful of individuals among those privy to the secret of the Manhattan Project had even contemplated. The bomb did not dictate a specific course of action; nevertheless, it remade the world. It did not cause the Cold War, but without it the Cold War would not have occurred.¹ The bomb's advent was shocking even to those who knew of its development. But, while the United States undertook a massive, high-level effort to plan for the postwar world

¹Indeed, had the atomic bomb not been completed until after postwar negotiations among the major powers were concluded, there would still probably not have been a cold war.

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(McLauchlan 1996; Gordenker 1999), relatively little consideration was given to the impact of the atomic bomb. The most important reason for this was that the bomb was such a revolutionary weapon that political leaders were unwilling to put much credence in it until it was actually demonstrated. In addition, uncertainties about its availability before the end of the war, its destructive power, and the quantity of bombs that could be produced persisted right up to the test detonation at Alamogordo, New Mexico on July 16, 1945.2

This paper examines the conflict between nuclear nationalist and nuclear internationalist discourses over atomic weapons policy as a critical event in the articulation of a new system of American power. I argue that the atomic bomb did not cause the Cold War, but, without it, the Cold War would not have occurred.

Orthodox View

The Cold War, according to a conventional understanding largely taken for granted in the mass media and clearly the orthodox position within the American political establishment, was a confrontation between two superpowers. One, the United States, was intent on defending freedom—capitalist democracy—globally, the other, the Soviet Union, was equally intent on subverting freedom in order to establish totalitarian rule.3

The lineaments of this narrative of the Cold War can be traced to some of the earliest formulations of postwar United States foreign policy doctrine, notably the “Long Telegram” concerning the sources of Soviet conduct by the diplomat (and then Ambassador to the Soviet Union) George F. Kennan (dispatched in Feb-


3 See, for example, Noam Chomsky’s sketch of mainstream political opinion in the early 1990’s at a time when Cold War retrospectives were the order of the day (Chomsky 1992, 9-19).
ruary 1946) and a report on Soviet foreign policy prepared at President Truman’s request by his assistants Clark Clifford and George Elsey during the summer of 1946.

In Kennan’s view, the Kremlin suffered from a “neurotic view of world affairs” rooted in a “traditional and instinctive Russian sense of insecurity” inflamed by the Marxist-Leninist doctrine of capitalist encirclement. Ultimately, both Russia’s survival and the cause of proletarian revolution mandated the defeat of the capitalist powers. The West had done nothing to incite this paranoia and, by the same token, could do nothing to alleviate it. It was not possible to negotiate with or placate Soviet Leaders, but they were responsive to manifestations of force (Nathanson 1988; Leffler 1992, 108-109). Kennan offered little in the way of explicit policy prescriptions, but his warnings about the “subterranean” methods the Soviet regime used to implement its policies were couched in a language that suggested how McCarthyism at home and neo-colonialism abroad might be justified.

Clifford and Elsey reiterated Kennan’s analysis of Soviet intentions and drew from it specific policy recommendations. The United States should expand and revitalize its military capabilities and prepare its overseas bases; in particular, “it must be prepared to wage atomic and biological warfare.” It should not entertain any “proposal for disarmament or limitation of armament as long as the possibility of Soviet aggression exists.” Domestically, “communist penetration should be exposed and eliminated whenever the national security is endangered.” And it should employ its extraordinary advantage in economic and financial resources to “assist all democratic countries which are in any way menaced or endangered by the U.S.S.R.” (quoted in Leffler 1992, 132). Thus emerged the doctrine of containment, which,

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as it developed, emphasized, in varying proportions according to changing circumstances and the predilections of different policymakers, military deterrence and intervention, economic development, political repression, and "wedge" strategies aimed at promoting and exploiting internal divisions among communist governments. These aspects of containment strategy were guided by the overall intention of surrounding communist governments with rings of hostile alliances while employing both economic and covert military means to weaken and, if possible, destabilize them.

Among scholars, the Cold War policies of the United States and, above all, the narrative of ideological confrontation that justified them has had many defenders, from the historians Herbert Feis (1957-1970), Louis Halle (1967), and Arthur Schlesinger (1967; 1992) to the more recent work of John Lewis Gaddis (1987; 1997). Schlesinger, himself an advisor to President Kennedy, noted the continuity of such scholarship with the official views of Washington. In distinguishing between an orthodoxy he wished to defend and a revisionist current that could no longer be ignored, he wrote that the "orthodox American view, as originally set forth by the American government and as reaffirmed until recently by most American scholars, has been that the Cold War was the brave and essential response of free men to communist aggression" (1967, 23). These scholars were united in claiming that the Cold War was a virtually inevitable consequence of two superpowers standing astride the world that were "constructed," as Schlesinger later put it, "on opposite and profoundly antagonistic principles":

They were divided by the most significant and fundamental disagreements over human rights, individual liberties, cultural freedom, the role of civil society, the direction of history, and the destiny of man. Each state saw the other as irrevocably hostile to its own essence. Given the ideological conflict on top of
the geopolitical confrontation, no one should be surprised at what ensued. Conspiratorial explanations are hardly required. The real surprise would have been if there had been no Cold War (Schlesinger 1992, 54).”

The inevitability of conflict in a story centered on Soviet-American relations, combined with an insistence that Soviet aggression imperilled basic American values, served to sympathetically account for, if not always to justify, those aspects of Cold War policies most at odds with liberal and democratic values; political repression and growth of the national security state and military-industrial complex at home; and military, political, and economic support for friendly dictatorships abroad.

Revisionist (Critical) View

In opposition to this orthodoxy has been a tradition critical of the motivations and worldview of United States policymakers. Historians writing in this tradition emphasize that the United States was in a position of unprecedented power at the end of the Second World War, with an economy that produced nearly 50% of world output; a military without equal in its technology and global reach; a monopoly of atomic weapons; and a homeland untouched by war. The Soviet Union, in contrast, had been devastated by the Nazi offensive of 1941-43 and would need years to recover. In short, the United States was arguably the least constrained nation on earth, and the Soviet leadership had compelling reasons to seek accommodation with it. Secondly, writers in the critical tradition have emphasized economic hegemony, the enhancement of state power, or both as primary motivations for United States policies. Economically, the United States was intent on quickly reconstructing the capitalist world system and wished to do so on the basis of liberal trading policies—the so-called “open door.” Because the United States was then the most efficient producer in a wide range of high-value product lines, it
stood to gain the most from such a trading regime (McCormick 1995, 47). At the same time, there were fears that if the world economy—particularly Western Europe’s—did not soon recover, the United States would lapse into another depression because of lack of markets. Moreover, if European recovery were not aided by the United States, European nations might turn inwards, forming a trading block or blocks closed to the United States, and might also elect socialist or communist governments. The Marshall Plan was one answer to this; another was the decision not to support independence movements in the European colonies if doing so would jeopardize prospects for the reintegration of newly independent countries into the world economy in their colonial role as raw materials suppliers and markets for Western Europe. Finally, policymakers saw in this approach the most reliable means to domestic political stability and the authority of the state at a time when the federal government was expected to actively manage the economy in the interests of steady growth and full employment.

The Soviet Union threatened this conception of an American-led postwar system. It was not willing to integrate its economic system with the West’s in exchange for postwar reconstruction aid. And, however awful the reality of Stalinism, the ideal of an economy managed by the state for the benefit of the masses appealed to many in Western Europe and in its colonies. Thus, the Soviet Union posed an economic and political, though not military, threat to the postwar ambitions of the United States. In sum, scholars in the critical tradition have regarded the Cold War primarily as the product of United States policymakers’ pursuit of empire, and have consequently characterized it as a multidimensional set of conflicts rather than a bi-polar confrontation.

**Orthodox and Revisionist Agreement**

There are two points about which the orthodox and critical traditions agree. First, interpretation matters. The narrative of
American conduct as a defense of liberty (or the construction of an "empire by invitation") has served not only to justify United States policies and the impact of the Cold War on the American state, but to position both within a laudatory view of the myth of American exceptionalism. The governing narrative of the Cold War has been, at one and the same time, a form of legitimation, a framework for institutional development, and a revision of American myth. By the same token, the critical tradition, insofar as it discovers in the Cold War American state a threat to American principles of democracy and political equality, challenges the existence of the national security state, the political hegemony of capitalism, and prevailing notions of United States leadership in the world.

Secondly, most writers in both traditions find in the Cold War strong continuities with underlying tendencies in American politics. In the orthodox tradition this is frequently married with equally sharp perception of continuities linking Bolshevik with czarist Russia. Thus John Lewis Gaddis opens his most recent work with a quote from Alexis de Tocqueville, "There are now two great nations in the world, which starting from different points, seem to be advancing toward the same goal: the Russians and the Anglo-Americans.... [E]ach seems called by some secret design of Providence one day to hold in its hands the destinies of half the world" (Tocqueville 1835 in Gaddis 1997, 1).

**Interpretation Matters**

For Gaddis, as for Louis Halle before him (1967, 10), the Cold War was Tocqueville's prophecy fulfilled, with the United States standing for a Wilsonian belief in collective or common security and the Soviets for unilateral approach that could only engender *insecurity* in others, with both positions rooted in di-

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5 A theory that applies chiefly to the U.S. role in Western Europe; see Geir Lundestad (1986); 1990, 1992.)
vergent national histories. The most obvious and important element of historical continuity in the critical tradition is United States expansionism and the economic, political and cultural factors that account for it. Thus for Williams, "the various themes which went into America's conception of the freedom and necessity of open-door expansion, from the doctrine of the elect to the frontier thesis, had been synthesized into an ideology before Roosevelt's death" (Williams 1962, 229). According to this ideology domestic prosperity, equal economic opportunity and the maintenance of social conditions conducive to democracy were all dependent on expansion. The critical tradition has insistently drawn attention to the underside of this: Native American genocide, the westward growth of slavery prior to the Civil War, a long string of foreign interventions stretching back to Jefferson's efforts to destroy the newly independent black government of Haiti, and the exclusive rather than inclusive character of American democracy for most of the country's history.

UNDERLYING TENDENCIES IN AMERICAN POLITICS

Temporal Development

The emphasis on continuity by the two traditions, albeit with opposite value signs attached, can be compared along four dimensions: temporal development, temporal coordination, nature and degree of narrative closure, and genre. Temporal development in both traditions is predominantly teleological. Orthodox accounts of the Cold War frame it as the delayed assumption by the United States of its role as world leader, thereby fulfilling its exceptionalist destiny. The Soviet Union is cast as that extraordinary peril whose existence enables the United States to abandon one aspect of its exceptionalism—isolationism—by recognizing its impossibility in an economically, technologically, and politi-
RETHINKING ATOMIC DIPLOMACY

97

cally integrated world. The closing passage of George F. Kennan's "Mr. X" article epitomizes this. The "thoughtful observer," Kennan wrote, will "experience a certain gratitude to a Providence which, by providing the American people with this implacable challenge, has made their entire security as a nation dependent on their pulling themselves together and accepting the responsibilities of moral and political leadership that history plainly intended them to bear" (1947, 582). This frees it to bring the blessings of liberty to other nations and to defend those whose liberty is in jeopardy. Halle is perhaps unique in embedding a cyclic pattern within this teleology, according to which the United States stepped forward to restore a desirable European balance of power when the European nations were no longer able (Halle 1967, 1-19). Russia—ambiguously European Russia, at one point "a European, not an Asian power" and, at another point, "neither Asian nor seeming quite European, speaking a language not understood outside its confines" (pp. 4 and 12)—is a hybrid monster, contaminated with Mongol blood, incorrigibly sunk in fear and insecurity, from which America, "a nation of European stock" and "a culture of exclusively European descent" must save Europe.

In the critical tradition, the Cold War as a period of American global dominance was the culmination of its capitalistic economic expansion melded with a conception of liberty intolerant of economic nationalism in other countries. Thomas McCormick, writing from a world systems perspective, regards this as a general feature of the economic logic of hegemonic power:

A single hegemonic power...has a built-in incentive to force other nations to abandon their national capitalism and economic controls and to accept a world of free trade, free capital flows, and free currency convertibility. As the world's dominant economic power, a hegemonic power has the most to gain from
such a free world and the most to lose from nationalistic efforts to limit the free movement of capital, goods, and currencies. So the preponderant world power is unequivocally self-interested in using its economic power, as workshop and banker of the free world, to create institutions and ground rules that foster the internationalization of capital. It finds it inherently advantageous to use its political power as ideologue of the world-system to preach the universal virtues of freedom of the seas, free trade, open door policies, comparative advantage, and a specialized division of labor (1995, 5).

American foreign policy thus combined egoistic moralizing (a broadly appealing ideology) with the protection and advancement of corporate interests. The Soviet threat, cast as a worldwide communist conspiracy, was sufficiently ubiquitous and ominous to permit American military and covert action forces to be deployed as needed in the interests of the economic and political security of the system (even if, in the long run, this complicated and undermined hegemony through over-extension and loss of credibility). Yet the critical tradition is not wedded to economic determinism, but has generated a variety of explanations for the Cold War, including contingent political events, such as Roosevelt's untimely death and the ascension to power of Truman and his secretary of state, James Byrnes (Yergin 1977; Alperovitz 1995, Messer 1982); the crystallization of a dominant ideology in which territorial acquisition metamorphosed into global economic expansion while retaining the political and cultural aura of the frontier with its promise of prosperity, individual opportunity, and protection against state power (Williams 1962); and the advent of the atomic bomb as an apparently “winning weapon” (Herken 1980; Ungar 1992; Alperovitz and Bird 1994); among others. While it may seem ironic in retrospect that expansionism in the Cold War context was conceived of as defense
against excessive state power, it was. On the one hand, of course, the American empire was supposed to guard the free world against the growth of a system based on unlimited and unchecked state power. But more subtly, there was concern among government and corporate officials that the alternative to empire was a thoroughly planned economy and, in consequence, a highly regimented social and political world, because absent an empire this would be the only way to guaranteed a balance between production and consumption. As then Undersecretary of State Dean Acheson testified before a congressional committee in 1944, to avoid "the most far-reaching consequences upon our economic and social system, you must look to foreign markets." True, "you could probably fix it so that everything produced here would be consumed here, but that would completely change our Constitution, our relations to property, to human liberty, our very conceptions of law. And nobody contemplates that. Therefore, you find you must look to other markets and those markets are abroad..." (quoted in Williams [1973] 1992, 343). Truman made very similar comments in defense of his anticommunist foreign policy (Leffler 1992, 13). The implications of this skepticism about teleological explanation will be considered shortly.

Temporal Coordination

Temporal coordination in the orthodox and critical traditions emphasizes synchrony, though in the latter case this is largely imposed, an artifact of power rather than a consequence of choices, moral imperatives, or laws of historical development. What I mean by synchrony is the identification of an overarching temporal ordering of events, a master storyline which governs and connects the temporality of social actors globally. In modernization theory, for example, which developed as an important ideological counterweight to communism (Woodiwiss 1993, 39), all societies are located at some stage of economic growth whose
apogee is the "age of high mass-consumption." W. W. Rostow, in his influential 1960 formulation, speculated that the United States, historically the first to reach this then highest stage, was moving towards post-materialist values (Rostow 1960, 4-12). Synchrony denotes an alignment of projects, meanings, and aspirations made possible by the ideological, economic, and technological leadership of the United States as the most modern nation or, in the critical tradition, by virtue of its global dominance and the processes of economic and technological globalization that follow.

Narrative Closure

As an essential element of containment doctrine and the Manicheism that justified it, early Cold War narratives in the orthodox tradition looked forward to the complete defeat of communism as ideology and movement. Narrative closure would be brought about by the fulfillment of a "transcendent purpose" (Morgenthau 1964). Narrative closure projected a path of rivalry with an armaments race, economic competition, proxy wars in the contested Third World, and little latitude for negotiation. This path, if persisted in, would conclude in victory for the West—a strong form of narrative closure. For Kennan, "Soviet power, like the capitalist world of its conception, bears within it the seeds of its own decay, and...the sprouting of these seeds is well advanced." Of course, victory would not be automatic, but "the United States has in its power to increase enormously the strains under which Soviet policy must operate, to force upon the Kremlin a far greater degree of moderation and circumspection than it has had to observe in recent years, and in this way to promote tendencies which must eventually find their outlet in either the break-up or the gradual mellowing of Soviet power" (Kennan 1947, 580-582). Given that successive administrations did indeed remain committed to both the policies of containment
and its doctrinal justification, detente notwithstanding, it is not surprising that the fall of the Berlin Wall coincided with the peculiar euphoria of Francis Fukuyama’s “The End of History?” in which the end of the Cold War was heralded as “the end of history as such: that is, the end point of mankind’s ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government” (Fukuyama 1989).

Because the Cold War American empire was, for the critical tradition, built upon the subversion and betrayal of American ideals of democracy and self-determination, its narratives could hardly end on a note of fulfillment or completion. This has been reinforced by the waning of faith in the progressive nature of history, so that even life cycle theories of declining American power (McCormick 1995, Brenner 1998) are hedged with doubt and do not open onto a necessarily better future. One way of coping with this, more evident in earlier writings, was the secular jeremiad. Among the Puritans, the typical jeremiad would attack a present danger by “(1) citing a scriptural example of normal conditions, (2) listing a series of condemnations of the community’s waywardness and infidelity, (3) reminding the people of God’s promises, and finally (4) assuring the listeners that God’s blessings will soon return abundantly” (Bush, Jr. 1988, 64). The 1963 “Port Huron Statement” of Students for a Democratic Society is an extraordinary example of the jeremiad’s secular vitality, with its evocation of childhood reverence for America’s sacred values contrasted with adult dismay at the discovery that they are contradicted by United States “economic and military investments in the Cold War status quo”; its biting criticisms of the depersonalization, manipulation, “loneliness, estrangement, [and] isolation” of human beings against the background of “the

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horrors of the twentieth century”; and its nevertheless hopeful proclamation that “we would replace power rooted in possession, privilege, or circumstance by power and uniqueness rooted in love, reflectiveness, reason and creativity.”

For some, stoicism, rather than the faith in America’s civic religion that underlies the jeremiad provides a different kind of narrative closure. Thus, Chomsky concludes his early 1990s assessment of the world emerging from Cold War by saying that “Popular forces in the United States and Europe have placed certain barriers in the path of state terror, and have offered some help to those targeted for repression, but unless they gain considerably in scale and commitment, the future for the traditional victims looks grim. Grim but not hopeless.... We are faced with a kind of Pascal’s wager: assume the worst, and it will surely arrive; commit oneself to the struggle for freedom and justice, and its cause may be advanced” (Chomsky 1992, 64).

A few works published in the immediate aftermath of the Cold War, such as Mary Kaldor’s *The Imaginary War*, thought it was “a period of political spontaneity, when real choices can be made about the future” (1990, 3). Kaldor’s optimism was linked to her theory of the Cold War as a phenomenon that stabilized and extended systems of power in both blocs, so that, “far from threatening each other, [they] reinforced each other through their shared need for an imaginary war” (5). The theory nurtured the expectation that the collapse of the Soviet bloc would be followed by the opening-up, if not dissolution, of the Western bloc as well.

Since, however, most writers in the critical tradition decentered the ideological-military confrontation with the Soviet Union, regarding it as means to other ends (chiefly the management of American allies and the domination of most of the Third World), the end of that confrontation did not unequivocally signal the end of the Cold War. Thus the ambiguous post Cold War
era is marked more than anything by new questions, especially about the configuration of global power among the major capitalist countries (and a rising few, notably China), the fate of the Third World as a shifting political-economic region, and the consequences of deepening social polarization, as well as the possible revival of suppressed desires for genuine democratization.

Genre

Finally, the predominant genre of both orthodox and critical narratives was tragedy, although with the end of the Cold War orthodox narratives have come to favor the heroic epic. Yet, although tragedy characterized narratives in both traditions during the Cold War, the kinds of tragedy invoked were polar opposites, as Schlesinger perceptively noted. Ruing that “even America, for a deplorable decade, forsook its pragmatic and pluralist traditions, posed as God’s appointed messenger to ignorant and sinful man and followed the Soviet example in looking to a world remade in its own image,” Schlesinger acknowledged that “the Cold War had its tragic elements.” However, “the question remains whether it was an instance of Greek tragedy—as Auden has called it, ‘the tragedy of necessity,’ where the feeling aroused in the spectator is ‘What a pity it had to be this way’—or of Christian tragedy, ‘the tragedy of possibility,’ where the feeling aroused is ‘What a pity it was this way when it might have been otherwise’” (Schlesinger Jr., 1967, 52). For Schlesinger and other orthodox scholars, the Cold War was a tragedy of necessity caused by the Soviet regime, while critical scholars such as Williams have indeed taken a Christian view, Williams even borrowing from a famous Christian in The Tragedy of American Diplomacy: “As Oliver Cromwell spoke to England, so history speaks to all men: ‘I beseech you, in the bowels of Christ, consider that ye may be mistaken’” (1962, 13).
The narrative styles and commitments outlined above do not all, by any means, entail the assimilation of the Cold War to pre-existing historical patterns. Orthodox narratives are unquestionably more thoroughgoing in doing so by virtue of their insistence on casting America and Russia as transcendent embodiments of good and evil. Yet, a pronounced tendency within the critical tradition has been to treat the Cold War as the latest chapter in the international development of capitalism and/or the continuing expansion of America. My own research on the origins of the Cold War has convinced me that an emphasis on historical continuity is an obstacle to understanding its origins. It is so not because continuist theories are wholly wrong, but because, at best, they mistake necessary for sufficient causes of the Cold War. In their rush to vest a sanctified national ethos or a logic of world capitalist development with a precise and effective causality, they fail to understand the transformative, world-shattering impact of the atomic bomb as a contingently necessary cause of the Cold War (contingent because its completion before the end of World War II was far from inevitable, necessary because it is very unlikely that any of the other factors identified in continuist theories would otherwise have produced a cold war). And while the orthodox brand of continuity has structured and legitimized a system of power, all models of continuity have served as defenses against the cultural shock of the atomic bomb.

In contrast to continuist theories, a growing tendency within scholarship in the critical tradition finds the sufficient causes of the Cold War in how top officials of the Truman administration and the American political establishment made sense of and responded to the advent of the bomb (Herken 1980; Alperovitz and Bird 1994; Alperovitz 1995; McLauchlan 1996). The account of the origins of the Cold War to which the remainder of this paper is devoted examines the conflict between nuclear nationalist and nuclear internationalist discourses over atomic weapons policy.
as a critical event in the articulation of a new system of American power.

ALTERNATIVE EXPLANATION

Roosevelt’s Approach to Postwar International Order

Even before the advent of atomic weapons, World War II had shown Americans that they could no longer rely upon two oceans to isolate and protect them from wars and political conflicts in the rest of the world. In addition, the Great Depression had exposed the dangers that economic autarky and the consequent reduction in trade posed to the American economy, dangers which the extraordinary wartime growth of that economy magnified. Because military power was based on industrial might and technological prowess, economic autarky was regarded as the ultimate source of potential military threats to the United States. Therefore both economic and geostrategic considerations underlay advocacy of global economic liberalism. Complementing this was the fact that the war had been fought against European imperialism in the name of national self-determination and democratic political rights. This vision of an economically open and politically liberal and democratic world was embodied in the most important early statement of Anglo-American war aims, the Atlantic Charter.

As the war progressed, support for postwar internationalism (of various kinds) increased. For Roosevelt, however, internationalism had to be reconciled with a postwar world in which the principle victors in the war would become the dominant powers. Hence, his conception of postwar security sought to apply balance of power realism to organize the victors, chiefly the United States and the Soviet Union, but also in a subordinate capacity Great Britain and, Roosevelt hoped, China (under Chiang Kai-shek’s Nationalist regime) into “Four Policemen” who would maintain world peace. As pressure grew for the estab-
lishment of a United Nations organization, balance of power thinking was incorporated into planning for it in the form of the permanent members of the Security Council (Yergin 1977, 46-48). At the same time, according to Gregory McLauchlan, collective decision-making about non-military matters by the United Nations was looked at as a way to “prevent the development of spheres and blocs (excepting, of course, the United States sphere and pan-American bloc in the Western Hemisphere)” (1996, 52; see also Leffler 1992, 59).

This thinking shaped Roosevelt’s agenda at the 1945 Yalta Conference. In Europe, he sought to eliminate Germany as a serious security threat in the postwar period. His approach to doing so stressed “industrial disarmament” to weaken Germany’s military-industrial complex—and simultaneously to cement American-Soviet cooperation (since Russia’s paramount security concern was also German rearmament) (Alperovitz and Bird 1994). This required acceptance of a Soviet sphere of influence in Eastern Europe, though the vaguely worded “Declaration on Liberated Europe” expressed the hope that the Soviets would allow political democracy in exchange for assurances that Germany would not rise again. In Asia, where Soviet entry into the war was thought essential to avoiding a “long and extremely costly” conclusion to the Pacific campaign, Roosevelt made concessions that recognized a Soviet security buffer while receiving Stalin’s agreement to enter the war against Japan and to renounce assistance to the Chinese Communists in favor of “a pact of friendship and alliance” with their Nationalist opponents (Messer 1982, 42-43; Leffler 1992, 81). The Yalta accords also included resolution of a difficult impasse over the veto power in the United Nations (the founding conference of which occurred three months later).

The postwar world envisaged by Yalta was an inclusive federation of unequal powers. Whether its limitations, and the chal-
lenge of reconciling its internationalist and nationalist dimensions, would have led in the direction of stronger world government or breakdown and crisis is impossible to know. Absent the atomic bomb, however, the postwar world would almost certainly have been built upon the Yalta agreements.

The Atomic Bomb and Its Fateful Choices

Roosevelt's death on April 12, 1945 came just as development of the atomic bomb was nearly complete. At his last meeting with the President on March 15, Secretary of War Stimson had warned Roosevelt that he would soon have a portentous decision to make:

On the question of future control [of atomic weapons], [Stimson] said, there were two schools of thought. One favored a secret attempt at control by the United States and Britain. The other proposed an international effort based on free interchange of scientific information and free access to the laboratories of the world: Stimson told the President these things had to be settled before the first bomb was used and that the White House must be ready with a public statement at that time (Hewlett and Anderson 1962, 340).

Truman, who was not told about the about the bomb until after he became President, inherited this question. It recurred at several critical junctures during the first 15 months of his administration—whether, how, and when to approach the Soviets; whether to use the bomb against Japan, and if so, how; whether to negotiate a cooperative international control agreement under the aegis of the United Nations or engage in a nuclear arms race. By the summer of 1946, the administration was clearly committed to the retention of nuclear supremacy at whatever cost, but until then, the issue was debated with an intensity that the politics of the Cold War subsequently obscured.
Proponents of nuclear internationalism argued that humanity faced a stark choice between international control and another arms race leading to a war of incomprehensible, possibly civilization-ending, destructiveness. In the most well thought out proposal for cooperative international control, the “Acheson-Lilienthal Plan,” an Atomic Development Authority would exercise monopoly control of the dangerous aspects of atomic energy while private and national institutions were permitted to develop its safer ones, including scientific and medical uses and the production of electric power. The plan, discussed in more detail below, deliberately emphasized the potential of such an agency to foster the balanced economic and scientific development of atomic energy globally. Proponents of nuclear nationalism, in contrast, held that the gravest danger to America and American values lay in the possibility that a totalitarian regime might gain an advantage in atomic weaponry. To prevent this danger required that America dominate any process of disarmament and international control, failing which it must do whatever was required to retain a decisive advantage in atomic technology and armaments.

The first identifiable stage in the administration’s atomic policy became known as “atomic diplomacy”—an attempt to use the implied threat of the atomic bomb to coerce extraordinary, otherwise unobtainable, concessions from the Soviets. Atomic diplomacy may, in part, have been a response to a domestic political climate increasingly shaped by right-wing forces that found in anti-Communism a way to attack all the New Deal reforms they detested. “The coming election, declared Republican National Committee chairman B. Carroll Reece in June 1946, would offer a stark choice between ‘Communism and Republicanism,’ since the ‘policy-making force of the Democratic Party’ was now committed to the Soviet Union” (Caute 1978, 26). By getting tough with the Soviets, Truman could hope to take the
sting out of such attacks. The Potsdam Conference, the last wartime meeting of the heads of the Grand Alliance, was postponed by Truman in order that results of the atomic test could be communicated to him in time to affect the American negotiating posture with Stalin (Alperovitz 1995, 141; Sherwin 1975, 193; Hewlett and Anderson 1962, 352). When reports came in that the magnitude of the explosion exceeded all expectations, Truman’s attitude and diplomatic objectives were transformed, and many of those in his inner circle were seized by grandiose dreams of almost unlimited power. Stimson, who subsequently became an advocate of cautious cooperation with the Soviets, was initially so moved by word of the bomb’s power that “he advised Truman the weapon might enable the United States to force the Soviet Union to abandon or radically alter its entire system of government” (Alperovitz 1995, 252).

With the bomb’s power confirmed but still secret, Truman and Secretary of State James Byrnes probably sought the stalemates that occurred on many issues at Potsdam. The historian Robert Messer, in his study of the two leaders, believes that Byrnes decided “the overriding significance of the atomic bomb would only sink into the remarkably obtuse Soviet consciousness after its power had been demonstrated in combat against Japan” (Messer 1982, 111-14; Cantelon, Hewlett, and Williams 1991, 61-62). Before leaving Potsdam, Truman foreclosed the last opportunity to prevent use of the atomic bombs by refusing to alter the unconditional surrender terms offered to the Japanese. Had he included assurances that the Emperor would be preserved in the Potsdam Declaration, assurances later provided in the surrender terms offered to the Japanese after the bombings, the Japanese might have accepted defeat (Alperovitz 1995, 292-301, 416-419; Moskin 1996, 270-272; Hewlett and Anderson 1962, 382-405).
diplomatic behavior. Secondly, the political establishment and the nation needed time to digest the significance of the bomb for their conceptions of a postwar world order. Thirdly, the need for a fundamental decision about postwar Soviet-American relations probably did not fully sink in until the limitations of atomic diplomacy became apparent, something which only occurred at the London Council of Foreign Ministers meeting in September. The illusion of the bomb as a panacea had to be shattered. Lastly, there is evidence indicating that those who preferred an anti-Soviet foreign policy feared the political repercussions of initiating a new era of global hostilities on the heels of the worst war in human history. Hence, they sought ways to test the political waters and to shift responsibility for any breakdown in Soviet-American relations to the Kremlin.

Between August 1945 and the following summer the conflict between nuclear nationalists and internationalists sharpened. The implications of each were more clearly drawn in competing approaches to key questions of postwar policy. The rhetoric upon which nuclear nationalism would come to depend was progressively unveiled during this time, with Truman’s Navy Day speech of late October an early example. Truman, without yet naming the Soviet Union as America’s enemy, characterized America’s atomic monopoly as a “sacred trust” required in order to uphold and promote the ten “fundamental principles” of its foreign policy (principles he explicitly compared to the Ten Commandments). Through his choice of metaphors, Truman sought to confer upon the United States a divine mandate. Winston Churchill, in his “iron curtain” speech of early March, 1946, not only cast Russia as a grave “peril to Christian civilization,” he sought to discredit the idea of the United Nations as the germ of a world government through which nuclear disarmament, and hence peace, could be achieved. Not only must we, he told his listeners, continue to rely on “the solid assurances of
The Potsdam Conference ended on July 31, 1945. A week later, an atomic bomb annihilated the city of Hiroshima, Japan. Two days later, the Soviet Union entered the war against Japan; the day after that, a second bomb destroyed Nagasaki. On August 14 Japan surrendered. While historians continue to differ about the motives for the atomic bombing, there is a consensus that they were not strictly military. By using the bomb the Truman administration sought to minimize Soviet involvement in the war against Japan, thus denying the Kremlin a significant role in its postwar occupation. Beyond this, it expected the bomb to "make Russia more manageable in Europe."\(^{viii}\)

The sudden revelation of an awesome new weapon capable of destroying entire cities transformed, in the words of cultural historian Paul Boyer, "not only military strategy and international relations, but the fundamental ground of culture and consciousness" (1994, xxi). Climaxing a war in which all the belligerents had resorted to massive attacks on enemy civilians, the atomic bomb struck many as the herald of humankind's eventual extermination. Rather quickly, the nuclear nationalist and nuclear internationalist alternatives, formerly confined to the tiny circle of individuals aware of the bomb, and both understood as radical departures from pre-atomic thinking, became the center of public commentary and debate.\(^{ix}\)

The cultural shock of the bomb affected the Truman administration itself, which during the fall of 1945, vacillated between using the implied threat of the atomic bomb to undergird an aggressive, confrontational diplomacy with the Soviet Union and an alternative policy that called for building on wartime trust to forge enduring agreements on European matters and the control of atomic weapons. There were several reasons for this vacillation. Divisions within the administration itself between anti-Soviet hardliners and proponents of mutual accommodation remained unresolved and showed-up in sometimes inconsistent
national armaments for self-preservation," we must strive to re-
main overwhelmingly dominant in atomic weaponry, for "if no
effort is spared, [then even after Russia develops such weaponry]
we should still possess so formidable [a] superiority as to impose
effective deterrents upon its employment or threat of employ-
ment by others."

What I am suggesting here is that the extraordinarily
Manichean language used to characterize the Soviet menace was,
in significant part, the artifact of a nationalist response by
American (and British) political leaders to their atomic advan-
tage. As the British scientist P. M. S. Blackett wrote a few years
later, "when a nation pledges its safety to an absolute weapon, it
becomes emotionally essential to believe in an absolute enemy"
(Ungar 1992, 97). Through nuclear nationalism the United States
conceived of itself as guardian at one and the same time of the
illusory "atomic secret" and of the ideals of democracy and free-
dom, with the former necessary to the global defense of the lat-
ter. But one could only identify with and draw upon the power of
the atomic bomb if one had a terrible enemy, for against any
lesser foe its use would be unconscionable. Moreover, since the
bomb had to be used against whole populations, it was better to
trace the source of antagonism to the enemy's national character,
its very culture and history, so as to confer upon the prospect of
genocide the morally redeeming pretense of purification.

During this same period nuclear internationalists sought both
to sustain hopes for global nuclear disarmament and resist efforts
to demonize the Soviet Union. Nuclear internationalism enjoyed
very broad, though not unanimous, support among the atomic
scientists. In addition, a number of prominent members of
Truman's administration, including Secretary of War Stimson
(who, however, retired in September of 1945), Undersecretary of
State Dean Acheson, Secretary of Commerce Henry Wallace, the
physicist J. Robert Oppenheimer, and David E. Lilienthal (then
head of the Tennessee Valley Authority) either urged the administration to make a genuine attempt to reach an agreement with Russia for the international control of atomic energy or took part in developing international control proposals. It also enjoyed significant support elsewhere in the political establishment and, of course, among the public. For example, Senators J. William Fulbright and Millard E. Tydings both argued the necessity of investing real enforcement powers in the United Nations. Tydings proposed world disarmament by 1950 combined with the establishment of a UN police force. That he nevertheless denied that this was "a breach of...our traditional sovereignty" indicates the political sensitivity of this issue (Tydings 1946, 296). Fulbright was more blunt: a major address he gave on the topic was subtitled "sovereignty must give way to law" (Fulbright 1946).

Because of this political division; because of the great fear the atomic bomb aroused of yet another, even more cataclysmic war; and because the Soviet Union had been a key ally of the United States in the war against fascism, it was politically impossible not to negotiate with the Soviets over the control of atomic energy. In the development of the United States negotiating position for these talks, and in the actual conduct of the negotiations, the conflict between nuclear nationalists and internationalists reached its climax, with victory, as we know, going to the nationalists. Victory, in turn, has rendered the internationalist alternative if not invisible then seemingly incredible or impossible. It was not so at the time, and resurrected in the wake of the Cold War that followed its rejection, it bears reexamination.

The Defeat of Nuclear Internationalism

Of the many signs of an emergent Cold War in 1946, none was more important than the failure of the United Nations atomic energy control negotiations. These negotiations officially began on June 14, 1946, with the presentation of the Baruch Plan,
named for Bernard M. Baruch, the United States representative to the UN Atomic Energy Commission (UNAEC). However, the Baruch Plan was only the final outcome of an episodic and sometimes convoluted process of policy formation that stretched back to the visionary but abortive efforts of Danish physicist Niels Bohr to persuade Roosevelt and Churchill (each of whom he met with in 1944) of the importance of reaching an international control agreement with the Soviets before the bomb was developed and used. Both leaders rejected Bohr’s approach. “Bohr wanted Roosevelt to offer Stalin, in effect, an atomic-age modus vivendi: international control of atomic energy and thereby security, in exchange for the surrender of the traditional national secretiveness that could offer but little such security in a nuclear-armed world” (Sherwin 1975, 97). Instead, they agreed, in September 1944, that “the matter should continue to be regarded as of the utmost secrecy.”

Shortly after Bohr’s efforts, Vannevar Bush and James B. Conant, the top scientist-administrators of the Manhattan Project, drafted a memorandum to Secretary of War Stimson warning that the atomic advantage possessed by United States and Britain was temporary and might disappear in as little as three or four years. Moreover, “not far in the future lay the hydrogen bomb, perhaps a thousand times more powerful. It promised to place every population center in the world at the mercy of the nation that struck first.” In view of this, and in order to prevent a potentially disastrous nuclear arms race, they proposed the “free interchange of all scientific information on the subject under an international office deriving its power from whatever association of nations was developed at the end of the war. As soon as practical, the technical staff of this office should have unimpeded access to scientific laboratories, industrial plants, and military establishments throughout the world” (Hewlett and Anderson 1962, 329-330).
A third major attempt to orient U.S. policy towards international control was made by atomic scientists at the Chicago Metallurgical Laboratory (an innocuous-sounding name given to the Manhattan Project research center there). In June 1945, a group there headed by James Franck submitted a report to the Interim Committee, a top-level atomic bomb policymaking group, opposing "an unannounced attack against Japan" because if the United States were to be the first to release this new means of indiscriminate destruction upon mankind, it would sacrifice public support throughout the world, precipitate the race for armaments, and prejudice the possibility of reaching an international agreement on the future control of such weapons. Much more favorable conditions for the eventual achievement of such an agreement could be created if nuclear bombs were first revealed to the world by a demonstration in an appropriately selected uninhabited area. 7

Like Bohr, the authors of the Franck Report believed that the prospects for international control would be immeasurably diminished by the unannounced military use of the weapon. Throughout the process of developing the atomic bomb and planning for its use, a sharp contrast persisted between U.S. policymakers' behavior towards their two chief wartime allies. The British were kept informed and, for the most part, treated as collaborators. Moreover, in the 1943 Quebec Agreement between the U.S. and Britain, the Roosevelt administration promised to consult with the British prior to using the bomb and, through the instrumentality of the Combined Policy Committee, set out to gain a preclusive monopoly of worldwide uranium deposits (Herken 1980). The Soviet Union was treated with silence

7The Franck Report was reprinted in the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, V. 1 n.10 (May 1, 1946): 2-4, 16. It can also be found as an appendix in Smith (1971).
and suspicion. The Franck Report warned against the continuation of this. It had little overt influence on United States’ policy. A fourth effort to orient U. S. policy towards nuclear disarmament came immediately after the bomb was used. Secretary of War Stimson, in ill health and about to resign, presented a memorandum to Truman on September 12 in which he urged an immediate, direct approach to the Russians about controlling atomic weapons, warning that otherwise “relations may perhaps be irretrievably embittered” leading to a nuclear arms race “of a rather desperate character.” He added “I consider the problem of our satisfactory relationship with Russia as not merely connected with but as virtually dominated by the problem of the atomic bomb.... Except for the problem of the control of that bomb, those relations, while vitally important, might not be immediately pressing. The establishment of relations of mutual confidence between her and us could afford to await the slow progress of time. But with the discovery of the bomb, they became immediately emergent” (Alperovitz 1995, 432-433; Herken 1980, 26). Stimson’s memo precipitated a special cabinet meeting at which opponents of his proposal characterized it as a “give away” of the atomic secret to the Russians (Herken 1980, 31).

Preparations for the United Nations Atomic Energy Commission (UNAEC) atomic energy control negotiations were the last notable effort to create a workable basis for international control. This opportunity came about in early 1946 when Secretary of State Byrnes named Dean Acheson chair of a committee to formulate American policy on the international control of atomic energy in preparation for the upcoming UNAEC talks. As Robert L. Beisner shows, Acheson in 1946 was far from being the orthodox Cold Warrior of his later career. He had been a vigorous supporter of Stimson at the special cabinet meeting where, according to Secretary of the Navy James Forrestal’s notes, Acheson declared that he “could not conceive of a world in which we
were hoarders of military secrets from our Allies, particularly this great Ally upon our cooperation with whom rests the future peace of the world.” Acheson had made a powerful case for Stimson’s views in a memo to the White House four days later (Beisner 1996, 327-329).

Acheson’s committee was assisted by a board of consultants that included David Lilienthal and J. Robert Oppenheimer. The board, in the course of six weeks of intensive effort, developed a draft of what became known as the “Acheson-Lilienthal Plan.” The plan was presented to the Acheson committee on March 7. Because of concerns expressed by Bush and Groves, they added a final section on safeguards for the U. S. during the transition to international control. With that, and rather unexpectedly, the committee gave the report its unanimous approval (Lilienthal 1964, 27-30).

In clarity of expression, logical force of argument, care in analysis, and wedding of hope to practical possibilities, the Acheson-Lilienthal Plan was undoubtedly the finest statement by proponents of cooperative international control. Its point of departure was that depending wholly on inspection and sanctions was futile. Recognizing this, “we have been concerned with discovering what other measures are required in order that inspection might be so limited that it would be practical.” The committee’s answer was cooperative international development through an atomic development authority. The international authority must itself control dangerous activities, including the mining and processing of uranium, operation of plants for the production of fissionable material, and conduct of research in nuclear explosives, because “only if the dangerous aspects of atomic energy are taken out of national hands...is there any reasonable prospect of devising safeguards against the use of atomic energy for bombs.” Direct control would eliminate “rivalry between nations” in the dangerous phases of atomic energy devel-
opment. It would reduce the need for inspections and the political frictions engendered by them. It would simplify inspection since, to take the example of mining, “not the purpose of those who mine or possess uranium ore but the mere fact of their mining or possessing it becomes illegal, and national violation is an unambiguous danger signal of warlike purposes.” Finally, it would make inspection more effective, since any nation intent on evasion would have to conceal the entire process of weapons development, and the total effort needed to carry through, from the mine to the bomb, a surreptitious program of atomic armament is so vast, and the number of separate undertakings so great, and the special character of many of these undertakings so hard to conceal, that the fact of this effort should be impossible to hide.

The committee’s second major conclusion was that “only if the international agency was engaged in development and operation could it possibly discharge adequately its functions as a ‘safeguarder’ of the world’s future.” Atomic energy “is a growing and changing field. If the international agency is simply a police activity for only negative and repressive functions, inevitably and within a very short period of time the enforcement agency will not know enough to be able to recognize new elements of danger…. Those in whose hands lies the prevention of atomic warfare must be the first to know and to exploit technical advances in this field.” Moreover, only an agency responsible for the “constructive possibilities of atomic energy” would be able to attract the talented and imaginative researchers and administrators required, for whom “merely negative police action would hold no appeal” (Smith 1971, 333).

Having established the character and delimited the responsibilities of the atomic development authority, the committee turned its attention to the important areas in the field of atomic energy where work may and should be open to private and na-
tional institutions. It considered a variety of uses in medicine and scientific research to be obviously safe. And it concluded that power reactors would be “safe provided there were a reasonable supervision of their design, construction, and operation,” and, thus, that reactor development could be opened up to private or national enterprise. Yet, since the fuel for these reactors would have to be produced by the atomic development authority, “if atomic power is developed on a large scale, about half of it will be an international monopoly, and about a half might be available for competitive exploitation.”

In the most politically sensitive section of its report, the committee then considered the position of the United States during the transition to an international control system. It acknowledged that “inherent in any plan of international control is a probable acceleration of the rate at which our present monopoly will disappear,” but emphasized that the process of turning over material assets and sharing knowledge could proceed gradually, and that disclosures required in the early stages “will not essentially alter the present superiority of the United States.” It recommended that the transfer of “our raw material supplies; the plants at Oak Ridge and Hanford; the stockpiles of bombs now in our possession; the stockpiles of undenatured fissionable materials; our atomic bomb plant and laboratory at Los Alamos” to the jurisdiction of the Authority “will have to be very carefully scheduled.” Similarly, “our monopoly of knowledge cannot be, and should not be, lost at once. There is rather wide freedom of choice in the actual scheduling of disclosures.” However, each stage of the transition would require the disclosure of information pertinent to its success (Smith 1971, 335).

On March 17 the Acheson-Lilienthal report was sent to Byrnes, and on March 28 the State Department publicly released it. According to Alice K. Smith, public response to it was “voluminous and highly favorable, although the inevitable extremes
of editorial comment inveighed against giving away secrets or dismissed the plan as admirable but visionary” (Smith 1971, 335). The report caused great excitement in scientific circles, particularly since it appeared at a moment when the national and international situations were becoming increasingly bleak. But the “ray of hope” that Edward Teller glimpsed in the report was quickly blotted out. At practically the same moment Byrnes was receiving the Acheson-Lilienthal Plan, he was asking Bernard Baruch to represent the United States at the UNAEC. Acheson, Lilienthal, and Oppenheimer, the three men most identified with the Plan’s ideas, were all dismayed by his selection, and Acheson tried to dissuade Byrnes from it (Herken 1980, 159-161; Smith 1971, 336-337; Beisner 1996, 331). Baruch was seventy-six years old, a Wall Street financier whose most important previous service in government had been as head of the nation’s industrial mobilization effort during World War I and as an advisor to Woodrow Wilson at the 1919 Versailles Peace Conference (Gerber 1982, 74). He was a conservative who considered national security thinking and Wilsonian internationalism complementary approaches to foreign policy. Fearing American vulnerability in an atomic age and doubtful that the American people could be roused quickly at the first sign of Soviet violation of an Acheson-Lilienthal system of control, he and his associates immediately set about modifying the Plan. They wanted “ironclad protections” against the possibility of Soviet defection during the transition to an atomic development authority, and they wanted potent and inescapable provisions for the punishment of violations during and after the transition (Gerber 1982).

Baruch exposed the dark underside of the atomic monopoly as a “sacred trust” in characterizing the world as under a sentence of death that would be lifted only if it sought redemption in a pact designed by the United States and whose implementation was effectively controlled by it. The United States, he said,
"stands ready to proscribe and destroy this instrument, to lift its use from death to life, if the world will join in a pact to that end. "It would only do so, however, after "an adequate system for control of atomic energy...has been agreed upon and put into effective operation and consign punishments set up for the violations of the rules of control...." He placed particular emphasis on the need for "immediate, swift, and sure punishment" of treaty violations and insisted that there "must be no veto to protect those who violate their solemn agreements" (UNAEC 1946, 4-14). Thus, "[w]hile the Soviets gave up critical information about their fissionable resources and their progress in atomic-weapons research...the United States could retain and enlarge its stock of bombs, conduct its tests, and in general maintain its massive lead in the field" (Boyer 1994, 55). The language of punishment combined with abandonment of the veto would, as then Undersecretary of State Dean Acheson recognized, strike Moscow as "‘an attempt to turn the United Nations into an alliance to support a United States war against the USSR unless it ceased its efforts’ to develop nuclear weapons" (Beisner 1996, 331-332; Smith 1971, 337-339). When Acheson and others objected to Baruch’s alterations of the plan they had crafted, Baruch threatened to resign, and Truman and Byrnes sided with him.

Abolition of the veto, in this instance at least, was superficially appealing, since otherwise the police power of the UN appeared to be ineffectual. Thus, James Conant, envisioning a control system based on frequent compulsory inspections backed by an international air force, looked to an international stockpile of atomic bombs as the ultimate weapon against violators (Sherwin 1985, 12). It was a utopian scheme, since it could not be effectively implemented without virtually replacing national sovereignty with a world government. The idealists were, ironically, more realistic in expecting far less in the way of diminished sov-
ereignty. Oppenheimer and others understood that the "sanction" for a serious treaty violation would be war or the imminent threat of war. As P. M. S. Blackett argued, sanctions were only meaningful where their application led "(a) to the restraint of the offending nation without war, or (b) to a short 'police' type of war." When, in contrast, "there are only two powers of comparable strength in the world...neither power can apply 'sanctions' to the other." Blackett apparently regarded Conant's proposal as either naive or insincere: "a little reflection shows the unreality of the suggestion. U.N.O. [United Nations Organization] is not an organism existing apart from its constituent nations, nor standing over and above the Great Powers. If the Great Powers fell out with each other, the existence of a stock of bombs nominally held by U.N.O. would have little effect on the situation" (Blackett 1946, 15; see also Edward A. Shils 1946).

Most scholars who have studied this initial attempt at international control believe that "Baruch explicitly designed his plan to perpetuate the U. S. atomic monopoly" (Leffler 1992, 116; Herken 1980 151-191; Gerber 1982; Beisner 1996,331; Harbutt 1986; 177-178; Weart 1988, 116-117). Some, however, have supported the Truman administration's view that Soviet opposition to an effective system of controls was largely to blame (Hewlett and Anderson 1962, 592). In the event, the talks quickly stalemated, and although they dragged on for months, no agreement was reached.

CONCLUSIONS

The Cold War, I have sought to argue, was not the consequence of an American-led defense of political democracy and market economies against a totalitarian foe implacably bent upon expansion. Yet it was also not the inevitable result of the pursuit of global hegemony by the United States and the opposition to that, symbolic as well as substantive, offered by the Soviet Un-
Without the creation of the atomic bomb at the end of World War II, there could not have been a cold war. Roosevelt’s foreign policy, embodied in the Yalta accords and in the design of the United Nations, treated the continuation of amicable relations with the Soviet Union as both a reasonable prospect and one necessary to postwar security. Nor did the Soviet Union suddenly begin behaving differently after Roosevelt’s death. Stalin essentially conceded United States preeminence everywhere but on Russia’s periphery. Moreover, Soviet policy in Eastern Europe initially varied among countries, with representative democracies being accepted in Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Austria, and Finland. Russia itself was devastated and, according to a United States intelligence report of November 1945, its government would be unlikely to chance a major war for at least fifteen years (LaFeber 1997, 28).xiii It was the atomic bomb that made the extraordinary anti-Soviet and anti-communist rhetoric with which the Cold War was declared politically possible. More importantly, the atomic bomb rendered pre-atomic conceptions of international security obsolete. For nuclear internationalists another, nuclear, war was unthinkable, and the prospect of it made the risks of cooperative international control worth taking. The nuclear nationalist response, candidly stated by Churchill, was to spare no effort to retain a “formidable superiority” in nuclear weaponry, relying on this to prevent war. Both were radical departures. Past arms races had usually presaged war, and there were many who doubted that the prospect of annihilation would be sufficient to prevent another. And nuclear internationalism, because it entailed the diminishment of national sovereignty, ran counter to the powerful current of “exceptionalism” in American political culture. However incredible one or both appeared, there seemed to be no other alternatives. Once the choice was made, however, the sense of incredulity was concentrated, both through deliberate effort and as a psychological by-product of the deci-
sion itself, almost entirely in the defeated internationalist alternative. For not only did an absolute weapon require an absolute enemy, such a depiction of the Soviet Union was obviously crucial to invalidating nuclear internationalism. Thus teleological explanations of American history, whether the teleology is for good or ill, attribute to structures or to a national ethos an illicit authority. Narratives of national identity and purpose may well be indispensable, but they do not write themselves. As one prominent historian recently concluded, "The Cold War will defy any single master narrative" (Leffler 1999).

REFERENCES


RETHINKING ATOMIC DIPLOMACY


ENDNOTES

It bears mention that Kennan was unhappy with the dominant role military power came to play in the practice of containment. He saw the Soviet threat as political and not military (Kaldor 1990, 39, Chomsky 1992, 23; Gaddis 1978).
ii See also Raymond L. Garthoff (1992): "The fundamental underlying cause of the Cold War was the reinforcing belief in both the Soviet Union and the United States that confrontation was unavoidable, imposed by history" (127). And William Hyland, editor of Foreign Affairs, remarked of the new post-Cold War situation, "The United States does in fact enjoy the luxury of some genuine choices for the first time since 1945" (1990; quoted in Chomsky 1992, 13).

iii A note on terminology: The critical tradition is more commonly referred to as "revisionist," a term that has been accepted as a self-label by some scholars (for example Williams, who in calling himself as an "intransigent revisionist" defined the revisionist as "one who sees basic facts in a different way and as interconnected in new relationships" (Williams [1973] 1992, 338). Nevertheless, the emphasis on newness inherent in revisionist has spawned, not surprisingly, "post revisionist," a term whose referent, unlike revisionist itself, is cloudy and contested. It is not, in any event, sheer newness that distinguishes Cold War revisionism from orthodoxy, but rather the critique it offers of prevailing beliefs and practices.

iv The racial politics of this decision, particularly the rejection of an aggressive pursuit of global racial equality via the new United Nations, are examined by Brenda Gayle Plummer in Rising Wind (1996).

Significant contributions to this tradition include William Appleman Williams, The Tragedy of American Diplomacy (1962); Joyce and Gabriel Kolko, The Limits of Power: The World and United States Foreign Policy, 1945-54 (1972); Fred Block, The Origins of International Economic Disorder (1977); Walter LaFeber, America, Russia, and the Cold War, 1945-1996 (1997); Mary Kaldor, Kaldor, Mary, The Imaginary War: Understanding the East-West Conflict (1990); Melvyn Leffler, A Preponderance of Power: National Security, the Truman Administration, and the Cold War (1992); and Noam Chomsky, Towards a New Cold War: Essays on the Current Crisis and How We Got There (1982) and Deterring Democracy (1992). In addition, Gar Alperovitz's Atomic Diplomacy: Hiroshima and Potsdam: The Use of the Atomic Bomb and the American Confrontation with Soviet Power (1965), with its thesis that the atomic bomb was used against Japan primarily to deny the Soviets a significant role in east Asia and to intimidate them in Europe, reshaped debate over the bomb and how historians approached it. (Alperovitz's The Decision to Use the Atomic Bomb (1995) is a major revision that draws upon a flood of recently declassified documents.)

v The world communist conspiracy, particularly the fear of widespread domestic subversion, symbolized the danger of corruption and loss of control should the country turn inward again. Thus the political defeat of isolationism by Truman's use of Soviet menace rhetoric was significant beyond its success in winning passage of the British loan, Marshall Plan, and other major elements of Cold War foreign policy. The defense of liberty at home now required its defense everywhere. And, conversely, the enthusiastic application of this same rhetoric against domestic progressives and radicals by conservatives, beyond the harm it did to lives, causes, and American values, offered symbolic protection to the cultural and political nation against contamination at a moment when the world as such,
more ominously than waves of immigrants had seemed to many Americans of earlier
times, was pouring in.

This geopolitical thinking (Gaddis 1987, 22-25; McLaughlan 1996) had ominous impli-
cations for domestic institutions and values. Many believed that, if the United States had
to face a hostile power or powers in control of the Eurasian land mass, national
self-preservation would require vesting the government with unprecedented authority to
manage the economy and social life, maintain a permanently high state of military pre-
paredness, and sharply restrict political freedoms. America, in short, would have to cur-
tail or even abandon its liberal, pacific, and democratic values.

This assessment of the consequences of continued isolationism stood a traditional
isolationist argument on its head. As media magnate Henry Luce put it in a 1941 mani-
ifesto for a liberal internationalist foreign policy, isolationists “fear that if we get into this
war, it will be the end of our constitutional democracy. We are all acquainted with this
fearful forecast C that some form of dictatorship is required to fight a modern war , that
we will certainly go bankrupt, that in the process of war and its aftermath our economy
will be largely socialized, that the politicians now in office will seize complete power and
never yield it up, and that what with the whole trend toward collectivism, we shall end up
in such a total national socialism that any faint semblances of our constitutional Ameri-
can democracy will be totally unrecognizable” (Luce 1941, 62). For a summary of the
debate over isolationism on the eve of American entry into World War II, see Melvyn P..

For surveys of the debate among historians about the motivations for and ethics of the
decision, see Barton J. Bernstein, “The Atomic Bomb and American Foreign Policy,
Samuel Walker, “The Decision to Use the Bomb: A Historiographical Update” (1990)
(for the period 1965-1989), and Gar Alperovitz, “Afterward” in The Decision to Use the

The “manageable” quote is attributed to James F. Byrnes. It actually appears in an
article by Leo Szilard quoting Byrnes during a meeting he and two other physicists had
with him on May 28, 1945, shortly before Byrnes became Secretary of State (Alperovitz

Robert A. Divine closes his history of the triumph of internationalism during World War
II with a passage that eloquently expresses how the grounds upon which pre-atomic
hopes rested were swept away:

Throughout the war the American people had looked forward to the creation of an
international organization as the dominant feature of the postwar world. Their vision of
the future centered in the fulfillment of Wilson’s dream. Suddenly they discovered that
scientists working secretly in laboratories in Chicago, Oak Ridge, Hanford and Los Alas-
omos were the real architects of the brave new world. E. B. White caught the feeling of
futility and despair which now blighted the triumph of the internationalists: “The prepara-
rations made at San Francisco for a security league of sovereign nations to prevent ag-
gression now seem like the preparations some little girls might make for a lawn party as a

THE JOURNAL OF POLITICAL SCIENCE
thunder head gathers just beyond the garden gate. The lemonade will be spiked by lightning” (Divine 1967, 314-315).

The Acheson committee included General Leslie Groves, military chief of the Manhattan Project; John J. McCloy, former assistant secretary of war; Vannevar Bush; and James Conant, then president of Harvard. In addition to Lilienthal (then head of the Tennessee Valley Authority) and Oppenheimer, the board of consultants included Chester Barnard, president of New Jersey Telephone; Charles Thomas, vice-president of Monsanto Chemical Corporation; and Harry Winne, vice-president of General Electric (Gerber 1982,71; Smith 1971,331).


Larry Gerber argues that this moral language was integral to Baruch’s Wilsonian worldlier. “Basic to Wilsonianism was a “complete faith” in what [N. Gordon] Levin calls “America’s liberal-exceptionalism,” that is, a belief that America enjoyed a moral superiority over other nations by virtue of its unique historical commitment to liberal-capitalist values and institutions” (Gerber 1982, 82).

LaFeber does not directly identify the intelligence report but does cite Matthew A. Evangelista, “Stalin’s Postwar Army Reappraised” (International Security, v. 7 (Winter 1982-1983): 121-122). See also Thomas G. Patterson, who adds to Russia’s military weaknesses the fact that it “had no foreign aid to dispense” and could not expect to succeed in seizing western Europe by a military thrust, since it “would [then] have to assume defensive positions and await crushing American attacks, probably including atomic bombings of Soviet Russia itself, plans for which existed” (Patterson 1988, 45).