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The Impact of the Korean War on the Cold War

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Theories of the cold war that stress the imperatives of the American domestic politico-economic system or the requirements of bipolarity are undermined by the argument that the Korean war strongly influenced international history and indeed brought about most of the characteristics which we associate with the cold war. Without Korea, U.S. policy would have been very different, and there were no events on the horizon which could have been functional substitutes for the war. The international or the American domestic system may have "needed" high defense budgets, the globalization of American commitments, and the militarization of NATO, but these patterns arose only in the wake of Korea. To explain the cold war in terms of such requirements is therefore inadequate.

INTRODUCTION

The argument of this article is threefold. First, the Korean war shaped the course of the cold war by both resolving the incoherence which characterized U.S. foreign and defense efforts in the period 1946-1950 and establishing important new lines of policy. Second, if the war had not taken place, no other events that were likely to have occurred would have produced the effects that Korea did. Unlike many earlier turning points, such as the British withdrawal from Greece and Turkey in 1947, there were few functional substitutes for Korea. Thus, without Korea, international history would have been very different. Third, this analysis

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casts doubt on theories which see the general outline of the cold war as explicable by such deeply rooted factors as the existence of bipolarity or the needs of the American economic system.

American policy during the height of the cold war was distinguished by the following features: (1) a high degree of conflict with the USSR; (2) a significant perceived threat of war; (3) high defense budgets; (4) large armies in Europe; (5) the perception of a united Sino-Soviet bloc; (6) the belief that limited wars were a major danger; and, following from the latter two beliefs, (7) anti-Communist commitments all over the globe. While the first and perhaps the second characteristics were present from 1946 to 1947, the other five came only after Korea. In some cases the war gave decision makers the freedom to do what they had wanted but previously had been unable to do. In others it changed their minds or pushed them in directions they had not thought of before. In all cases it took the Korean war to bring about the policies that we associate with the cold war.

U.S. POLICY, 1946-1950

American policy in the years 1946-1950 was not highly coherent. Conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union was high; there were crises too frequent and familiar to mention; and decision makers talked of the real possibility of war. However, the United States' response was not proportionate to the perceived dangers. American forces were small and the defense budget was low compared with what was needed to meet the threat that was described.

PERCEPTION OF THREAT

It is difficult to say how American leaders saw the nature of the Soviet threat and impossible to put a number on the perceived probability of war. Events produced quick changes. People differed in their assessments. Many were torn, uncertain, and contradicted themselves. Almost no one thought the Russians were seeking a war; they were seen as far too weak for that. Almost no one felt certain that peace would last for many years; Russian hostility and probing posed too many dangers for such confidence. For example, not only did the crises of early 1948 lead to General Clay's well-known warning that war might come with "dramatic suddenness" and to the intelligence community's refusal to

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predict that peace would be maintained for longer than two months, but more considered judgments were far from reassuring. NSC 7 (March 1948) reported that although the USSR sought a period of peace in which to build up its strength, it "might resort to war if necessary to gain its ends" (FRUS, 1948, I, pt. 2: 547). This danger was great enough to justify greater rearmament and the reinstitution of the draft. In the summer of 1948, the possibility of war was taken seriously enough to merit the development of an NSC paper (20/1) setting forth U.S. goals in a Soviet-American war (Etzold and Gaddis, 1978: 173-203). Three months later NSC 20/4 argued: "The capabilities of the USSR to threaten U.S. security by the use of armed forces are dangerous and immediate" (FRUS, 1948, I, pt. 2: 664; also see NSC 20/2 in FRUS, 1948, I, pt. 2: 619).

On the other hand, at the end of the year in which these gloomy prognostications were made, the Moscow Embassy reaffirmed its view that Russia was counting on several years of peace, and its assessment in the spring of 1949 was slightly more optimistic than it had been the year before (FRUS, 1948, I, 2: 943-947; FRUS, 1949, V: 604; FRUS, 1949, I: 293-295). At the end of 1949 Dean Acheson agreed, noting that "Soviet history seems to be against military adventures which entail any risk" and concluding that there was every reason for the Russians to continue concentrating on political moves (FRUS, 1949, I: 614-615).

That the Soviet Union was not seen as desiring war merely disposed of the most obvious danger. According to the NSC 20/2, the USSR "is still seeking to achieve its aims predominantly by political means, accompanied—of course—by the factor of military intimidation. The tactics which it is employing, however, themselves heighten the danger that military complications may arise from fortuitous causes or from miscalculation" (FRUS, 1948, I, pt. 2: 298). The latter danger was constantly stressed, perhaps in part because no one could specify how a war might start. NSC 20/4 elaborated:

> Now and for the foreseeable future there is a continuing danger that war will arise either through Soviet miscalculation of the determination of the United States to use all the means at its command to safeguard its security, through Soviet misinterpretation of our intentions, or through U.S. miscalculation of Soviet reactions to measures which we might take [FRUS, 1948, I, pt. 2: 667; also see Llewellyn Thompson's remark in FRUS, 1949, I, pt. 2: 293].

Another concern was that the Russians would react to a setback by undertaking "some spectacular further move designed to recoup the

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loss of prestige" (FRUS, 1948, IV: 834; also see FRUS, 1948, I, pt. 2: 674). At other times, such as during the Berlin blockade, the fear was that the prospect of the growing strength of West Germany and Western Europe could lead Russia to feel her security menaced and "induce a decision that it's 'now or never,' in the expectation that hostilities now would at least forestall this growing western strength" (FRUS, 1948, IV: 920). These were the mainstream opinions. Their drift is charted by Kennan's dissent: The "extreme anxiety" that was common rested "on an incorrect appraisal of Soviet intentions" (FRUS, 1947, I: 770-776—these remarks were made in the fall of 1947 but they also apply in later years). Kennan probably was right, but he was in the minority.

PERCEPTIONS OF AMERICAN POWER

Soviet expansionism created the danger of war; Soviet weakness and American strength were credited with limiting it. The nuclear monopoly was seen as important, but not decisive. The small stockpile grew slowly (Rosenberg, 1979; 65-69; York, 1976: 19), and few leaders thought that nuclear weapons could win a war by themselves. Furthermore, American generals could not be sure the President would authorize use of the bomb, and some civilian leaders were not sure the Russians expected America to employ it. Indeed, in the fall of 1948 Secretary of State Marshall noted that "until fairly recently I thought the Soviet leaders probably had felt that the American people would never permit the use of the bomb" (FRUS, 1948, III: 281; also see FRUS, 1948, I, pt. 2: 624-628; Rosenberg, 1979: 68-69; and Truman's remarks quoted in Sherry, 1977: 200).

Probably more important than the bomb, the Americans believed, was the fact that behind the small army lay a huge industrial complex. As General Bradley put it when telling senators why the North Atlantic Treaty could bring security to Europe without providing a large standing army: "No country is any stronger than its industrial capacity. At the present time we have that great potential which is a deterrent to any country if they know we are going to get into it" (U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, 1949: 305). Even Secretary of Defense Forrestal, who felt the U.S. defense posture was inadequate, admitted: "As long as we can outproduce the world, can control the sea and can strike inland with the atomic bomb, we can assume certain risks otherwise unacceptable" (Millis, 1951: 350-351).[1] Tokens of U.S.

1. For a discussion of the doubts decision makers felt about the contribution of mobilization to American defense and deterrence strength see Sherry (1977: 198-205).

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support for Europe were sufficient to convince the Russians than an attack, although successful in the short run, eventually would be met by superior might. Defensive capability that could ward off an attack was not needed.[2]

However, the combination of Soviet weakness and the supposedly powerful deterrent did not make American leaders confident that Russia would remain quiescent or that the United States could cope with the moves the USSR could make at so many places along her borders. Forrestal consistently felt that the United States had to bring its strength "up to the point where it more nearly met the realities of the world situation"; and Marshall, who resisted higher spending (telling Forrestal in May 1948 that his foreign policy was based on "the assumption that there would not be war"), often felt, as he put it in 1948, that "we are playing with fire while we have nothing with which to put it out" (Millis, 1951: 373, 393, 432,).

American foreign and defense spending was thus conflicted, if not schizophrenic. On one hand, there was a perception of high threat. On the other hand, the means developed to cope with it were slight by later standards and could not meet the felt needs. Few decision makers felt the situation was satisfactory.

WHY U.S. EFFORTS DID NOT MATCH THE PERCEIVED THREAT

The explanation for the gap between needs and efforts is both intellectual and political. These factors reinforced each other as the political inhibitions against increasing American forces reduced the incentives for critically examining the policy, and the lack of a well-developed alternative decreased the political pressures for change. On the intellectual level, decision makers were unsure of the nature and degree of the Soviet threat and the kinds of forces necessary to meet it.

2. This line of argument led to an obvious inquiry which was to lose none of its relevance over the next 30 years: If the troops could not defend Europe, what was the point of stationing them there? As Senator Lodge put it in the hearings on the Truman Doctrine when he questioned the need for sending military aid and advisors to Turkey: "Would you get the same effect if . . . the President and State Department were to declare . . . that the integrity of Turkey is vital to the interest of the United States—period? Would that not do just as well? . . . You can threaten [the Russians by] passing a few paragraphs in Washington as well as you can by sending 50 Americans in uniform, can you not" (U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee, 1947: 52)? Also see Eisenhower's discussion of the need for sending American troops to Europe in 1951 (U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee, 1951: 25).

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Furthermore, some people in the State Department, particularly Secretary Marshall, believed that vigorous rearmament might provoke the Russians into spending more or taking rash actions (Schilling, 1962: 147). Second, there was disagreement and ambivalence about how the Russian menace could be combated. The theory of deterrence which, for all its faults, at least supplied intellectual clarity, had not been developed. The question of "how much is enough" rarely was squarely faced, let alone clearly answered. Did the United States need to be able to win a war, or could it deter Russia by threatening to destroy Soviet society? How much damage to the Russian military forces and/or domestic society could nuclear weapons inflict?[3] What sort of Soviet actions could the United States deter with its nuclear monopoly? When the United States lost that monopoly but still had superiority, would the deterrent cover fewer objects? (Acheson wrote an interesting memorandum on this subject: FRUS, 1949, I: 612-617.)

To argue that nuclear weapons were insufficient and that the United States had to be prepared to match the Russians on all levels of force was to call for great increases in the U.S. military establishment. However, in the political climate of the late 1940s this would have been unpopular. Competition for funds, always severe, was compounded by the myth that the economy could not stand higher spending. For example, in September 1949 the chairman of the Council of Economic Advisors responded to an NSC paper which urged an extra $2 billion for defense, claiming that the resulting deficit "would have such adverse effects on the functioning of the domestic economy as to threaten total national security in ways which must be weighed seriously against whatever gains for national security in the strategic and diplomatic sense would result from those levels of expenditures" (FRUS, 1949, I: 395). Even Forrestal had "the greatest sympathy" with the dominant view (Millis, 1951: 536). The pressures for economizing were so great that the administration's request for the fiscal year 1951—the budget Congress was contemplating in June 1950—was almost 15% below the appropriations for the year before. The sources of the strength of this belief are still not clear, but it inhibited serious consideration of a new defense policy and made far-reaching changes all but impossible.

3. The first significant study of this question was the Harmon Report of May 1949. For excerpts see Etzold and Gaddis (1978: 360-364); for a discussion see Rosenberg (1979: 71-74).

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Other political problems lay abroad. To convince the Europeans to increase their arms budgets would also be difficult. Even more importantly, as early as 1947 decision makers recognized that Europe could not be defended without a large contingent of German troops. However, proposals for German rearmament were sure to encounter strong opposition from Britain and France, and the United States was not going to waste its political capital seeking the impossible. As late as June 5, 1950, Acheson, while admitting that NATO defenses were "totally inadequate," reaffirmed the American commitment to the demilitarization of Germany, telling the House Foreign Affairs Committee: "There is no discussion of doing anything else. That is our policy and we have not raised it or revalued it" (1950: 22). By this time the Joint Chiefs of Staff were trying to alter the policy, but without success.

NAT(O)

These inhibitions partly explain the initial shape of NATO. It is no accident that the official documents refer not to the familiar set of initials just used, but to the NAT countries. It was not a real organization in the early years. (In the period 1945-1947 the UN was called the UNO—it may be an American penchant to call something an organization when and only when it is believed to be effective.) It was an alliance of "political guaranty," to use Osgood's apt phrase (1962: 30). However, the policy suffered from some of the same problems discussed earlier. The military force deployed could not beat back a significant attack, and statesmen were not confident that a symbolic commitment was sufficient. Many decision makers realized, at least at times, that their beliefs implied the need for something more substantial. Thus, in April 1949 General Bradley argued: "It must be perfectly apparent to the people of the United States that we cannot count on friends in Western Europe if our strategy dictates that we shall first abandon them to the enemy with a promise of later liberation" (quoted in Osgood, 1962: 44) and Acheson occasionally took the same position (U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee, 1949: 44). More often a less grandiose goal was seen as appropriate. According to Acheson,

> We do not believe that to discourage military aggression it is necessary to create Western European defense forces which are by virtue of their size capable of successfully resisting an all-out attack. What is required is, rather, sufficient strength to make it impossible for an aggressor to achieve a quick and easy victory [quoted in Osgood, 1962: 43].

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This justification was never fleshed out. Why would such a posture deter? Were the Russians motivated enough to attack Western Europe in the face of American strategic nuclear weapons if they thought they could make a "quick and easy" conquest, but not so aggressive that they would attack if victory would take a bit longer and kill a few more of their soldiers?

The problem did not loom as large as it might have because many American leaders thought that the NAT's target was Europe, not Russia. The aim was to make Europeans feel secure so that they could get on with the task of economic recovery. With American support, "potential victims [of aggression] would feel sufficiently reassured to refuse to embark on a fatal policy of appeasement." Furthermore, the Europeans would be emboldened to resist "internal fifth-column aggression supported by the threat of external force, on the Czech model" and oppose "indirect aggression" (FRUS, 1948, III: 40-41, 63, 74, 187, 239, 285). The diplomats had in mind internal threats and internal political pressures when they said: "Italy must be accommodated in any arrangement ultimately worked out. Italy, even more than Norway, is now most directly menaced" (FRUS, 1948, III: 61).

But this analysis too was not entirely coherent. The remedy would be effective only if the Europeans would feel reassured, and, in the Americans' own analysis, there was little reason for them to feel reassured. The problem is illustrated by a passage in NSC 20/2 (August 1948):

> The peoples who consider themselves as lying between the U.S.S.R. and the U.S. and who are endeavoring to resist Soviet political pressures are strongly influenced by what may be called the shadows of the armed strength maintained by the two great powers. If the shadow of the Soviet armed strength remains too formidable, in comparison with ours, this may well have a paralyzing effect on the will to resist in Western Europe and may become an important factor in enabling the Russians to achieve their aims by political rather than military means. It is therefore necessary for this country to maintain the outward evidences of firm armed strength and resolution as a means of stiffening the attitude of those peoples who would like to resist Soviet political pressures [FRUS, 1948, I, pt. 2: 622; also see Kennan's view in FRUS, 1948, III: 285].

But the United States had rejected a policy of effective defense of Europe, and why should the Europeans pay attention to American moves which lacked military significance?

A related objection was raised by George Kennan: If the United States wanted to reassure the Europeans and yet was unable to defend

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them, would not token efforts merely call attention to the military danger?

> Time and again . . . I said to my colleagues: "All right, the Russians are well armed and we are poorly armed. So what? We are like a man who has let himself into a walled garden and finds himself alone there with a dog with very big teeth. The dog, for the moment, shows no signs of aggressiveness. The best thing for us to do is surely to try to establish, as between the two of us, the assumption that teeth have nothing whatsoever to do with our mutual relationship—that they are neither here nor there. If the dog shows no disposition to assume that it is otherwise, why should we raise the subject and invite attention to the disparity?" [Kennan, 1967: 408; also see Forrestal's view in FRUS, 1948, I, pt. 2: 542]

Part of the reason why Kennan's solution found few adherents was that his confidence that the "dog" would not "use its teeth" was not shared. Because the Soviet military threat could not be dismissed, the ability to protect Western Europe was a desired goal, albeit one that could not be reached because of the public's refusal to pay the price.

In the 18 months after the NAT was signed, there were some moves to make it a real organization. Coordination in the economic and political realms as well as the military was discussed, and in May 1950 the members agreed to establish a permanent executive committee that would develop plans for a military force that would be effective and yet would not disrupt economic recovery. (The American ideas on this subject can be found in FRUS, 1950, III: 43-130.) However, the organization remained largely symbolic; the incoherence noted earlier remained. On one hand, the JCS wanted German rearmament, and Acheson told Congress that "we are a long way from having an adequate security force for the North Atlantic Treaty (quoted in Kaplan, 1977: 49-50). On the other hand, the May 1950 NATO council meeting had no sense of urgency (Dennett and Turner, 1951: 210); Acheson and Eisenhower said they saw no immediate threat of war (McGeehan, 1971: 3; U.S. Senate Appropriations Committee, 1950a: 697); and no one advocated U.S. combat troops for Europe or a NATO military commander (Bohlen, 1973: 303-304).

UNLIMITED WAR

A war in Europe, it was assumed, would be unrestrained. Indeed, the whole concept of limited war which was to loom so salient after Korea

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was hardly present. As General Ridway explained, "The concept of 'limited warfare' never entered our councils" (1967: 11). (It was for this reason that the Joint Chiefs of Staff planned to abandon Korea in the event of war. An attack there would form only one small front in the world war and would not be worth the expenditure of scarce military resources. This belief also helps explain the lack of impact of the intelligence reports on the North Korean military build-up.) The decision makers had not rejected the idea of limited war; rather, they had not given it serious thought. Furthermore, consideration of it was inhibited by the same factors discussed above—to fight limited wars called for expensive capabilities which, in the prevailing political climate, the United States could not acquire.

To be sure, the picture was not entirely clear-cut. References to what would later be called limited war crop up occasionally (FRUS, 1948, I: 565-566; FRUS, 1948, III: 98; FRUS, 1949, I: 197, 416; President's Air Policy Commission [better known as the Finletter Report], 1948: 22). Decision makers noted the possibility that war might be "waged by one or a combination of the satellites with the avowed neutrality or disapproval of the USSR, though with her covert support" (FRUS, 1948, I, pt. 2: 547). Senators talked of the possibility of the Russians seizing Alaska, although for what purpose is not clear. By 1950 increasing numbers of people called for the ability to fight small wars. Indeed, while NSC-68 did not use the term "limited war," it talked about the need to meet military challenges below the all-out level. It is not clear, however, that the authors fully understood the implications of this argument, which was merely one of several that they advanced. Their view, furthermore, was still a minority view. Nowhere was the belief in the possibility of limited wars spelled out with an analysis of what could cause them, keep them limited, and how they might be fought. Although by the spring of 1950 the idea of limited war could be brought to the surface quickly, as is shown by the fact that, at the first meeting after the outbreak of the Korean War, President Truman asked the Air Force to "prepare plans to wipe out all Soviet air bases in the Far East" (FRUS, 1950, VII: 160; also see 159), it was not a danger decision makers worried about or even a concept that they fully grasped.

LIMITED COMMITMENTS

Partly because the concept of limited war was not salient, U.S. policy was not preoccupied with deterring Soviet moves all over the globe. The

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domino theory and the concomitant stress on maintaining American credibility were not yet major components of American policy. Of course, a mild version of these beliefs underlay the Truman Doctrine and U.S. policy in Iran. In defending the former, one administration spokesman argued:

> Anything that happens in Greece and Turkey inevitably has an effect on the rest of the Middle East, in Western Europe, and clear around into the Pacific, because all these people are watching what the United States is doing. . . . [I]f the countries of the world lose confidence in us they may in effect pass under the Iron Curtain [U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee, 1947: 160; also see FRUS, 1950, VI: 802-804].

However, these claims were infrequent and designed in part for public consumption. Proponents of aid to Greece and Turkey felt that the program would be politically acceptable only if it were justified in dramatic and far-reaching terms.

The pre-Korea views were not only vaguer and less developed than the later beliefs, but they were distinctive in three related ways.[4] First, they focused on regions of high intrinsic interest to the United States. Kennan argued that containment needed to be applied only to the three areas of the world that held concentrations of industrial might that could alter the balance of power (the U.K., the Rhine valley, and Japan; Kennan, 1967: 359-368, 373-374). Kennan was in the minority on many issues, but in this case he was not. Although the old geopolitical view was fading, it still had a strong hold on most decision makers.

Second, unlike in the later period, the need to impress the Soviets with American resolve and commitment was not central. Where the United States had vital interests, the task of revealing this to the Russians was thought to be difficult but feasible. Where interests were less important, the United States did not need and was not able to extend its protection. The top leadership did not believe the world was so interconnected that the growth of Communism in one area would have drastic ramifications all over the globe. The other side of this coin was that extending protection far and wide was seen as prohibitively costly because decision makers did not believe that commitment by itself, without local defense, could be effective.[5] The American threat to

4. Of course, some officials were ahead of their time. The cables of Edmund Gullian, Consul in Saigon, and the memoranda of Dean Rusk and John Foster Dulles display better-developed versions of the theory.

5. It may be noted that this worry implies the danger of limited wars, although this connection was not sharply drawn at the time.

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retaliate against Communist attacks on obscure areas would not be credible because in a world that was not tightly interconnected the costs of not responding were relatively low.

Third, local actors and problems were seen as more important than they were later. The behavior of the superpowers, although important, would rarely dominate the situation. Thus, American aid, even in Europe, was to be given only when it constituted the "missing component"—when the country had almost all the elements needed to stave off the Communist threat and limited U.S. assistance could make the difference between success and failure. Given the tight budgetary restrictions, the United States' role had to be very limited. Thus, only a few cases could qualify, and even areas of strategic value were not to be contested unless the circumstances were propitious.

On this question, political constraints again reinforced intellectual justifications. To have based a policy on the domino theory would have required domestic agreement that the United States should pledge itself to defend areas of low intrinsic value. In an era when isolationism was still strong, gaining support for the North Atlantic Treaty had been a major achievement. To have tried to extend this concept to other countries would have been foolish. Indeed, in 1948 John Foster Dulles and Senator Vandenberg told Secretary Marshall that they were concerned lest the fact that the NAT was in part justified as a regional arrangement under the UN Charter should lead to pressures on the United States to agree to similar agreements in other parts of the globe (FRUS, 1948, III: 104-106). The knowledge that such extensions were politically impossible inhibited decision makers from thinking about whether they were desirable. Just as was true for the defense budget, the possibility of arriving at a conclusion which set perception of the national interest sharply at variance with political interest discouraged people from looking at the question.

PERCEPTIONS OF SINO-SOVIET RELATIONS

Another reason why there was less fear of dominoes falling than there was later was that, even though relations with China were hostile (for good discussions see Cohen, 1980; Gaddis, 1980), key decision makers did not perceive a Sino-Soviet bloc. Given the basic orientations of the United States and China, quite a bit of conflict was inevitable, and the administration assumed that China would be an enemy in the event of hostilities with the Soviet Union and adopted NSC 48/2 at the end of

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1949, which summarized a policy of anti-Communism in Asia (FRUS, 1949, VII, pt. 2: 1215-1220; for the longer paper, NSC 48/1, of which this is the conclusion, see U.S. Department of Defense, 1971: 226-264). However, Acheson and others saw the Russian role in the Chinese revolution as limited and the gain for the Soviet Union as only temporary. If, in 1949, China was under a "foreign yoke" and acting "in the interests of a foreign power," as Acheson put it in the introduction to the China White Paper (U.S. Department of State, 1949: xvi), the bonds between Moscow and Peking would eventually be severed by the growth of the latter's nationalism, which would be directed against the Russian concessions in Manchuria. Communist China would not always be America's enemy, and the United States should be prepared to cooperate with her on reasonable terms.

This analysis put limits on U.S. hostility toward China. NSC 48/2 declared: "The United States should exploit . . . any rifts between the Chinese Communists and the USSR" (FRUS, 1949, VII, pt. 2: 1219; also see FRUS, 1949, IX: 161) and Acheson stressed that "We must not undertake to deflect from the Russians to ourselves the righteous anger, and the wrath and hatred of the Chinese people which must develop" (U.S. Department of State Bulletin, 1950: 115), a theme than ran through his thinking throughout 1949 and the first half of 1950 (see, for example, FRUS, 1949, IX; 160-161, 295). In private, Acheson admitted that the process would slow down. "We are in a position resembling that in which Russia found herself in 1927 when she was driven from China and her influence liquidated. It has taken her 22 years to return to a position of dominant influence and it may take us as long" (FRUS, 1949, IX: 466; also see FRUS, 1949, VIII: 519-521).[6] It was crucial that the spread of Communism did not automatically and permanently increase Soviet power. China would turn against Russia, and it was possible and vital for the United States to encourage this development. Although few people in the government shared Acheson's view, he was usually able to convince the president.

The most hotly debated manifestation of this policy was the administration's decision to limit its attempts to protect Formosa to diplomatic and economic measures, which were not expected to be successful. The Joint Chiefs of Staff were ambivalent about this policy. They saw China as a menace and stressed the strategic value of Formosa in the event of war. Thus, in February 1949, they called for the basing of minor U.S. naval units in Formosan ports (FRUS, 1949, IX: 284-286).

6. Acheson got it exactly right. Twenty-two years after 1949 takes us to 1971.

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This proposal was defeated, but in December they argued that the United States should increase its aid, provide military advisors, and "make an immediate survey of the nature and extent of the military assistance required . . . in order to hold Formosa against attack" (FRUS, 1949, IX: 461). However, their pressure was limited by their recognition that "the strategic importance of Formosa does not justify overt military action . . . so long as the present disparity between our military strength and our global obligations exists" (FRUS, 1949, IX: 377).

In January 1950 Truman publicly defended the nonintervention stance that he had privately endorsed the month before (FRUS, 1949, IX: 460-468), but the debate flared up again in the spring. Although the CIA still believed that the Communists would take the island, its estimate of April 1950 noted that "an improved situation for the Nationalists somewhat weakens the assurance with which the timing of future events can be forecast" (FRUS, 1950, VI: 330). The Joint Chiefs of Staff, supported by MacArthur, continued to seek ways of keeping Formosa out of Communist hands. Many Republican leaders continued their attacks on the administration for its refusal to provide more assistance to Formosa; and in May 1950 John Foster Dulles and Dean Rusk, then Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs, stressed the political costs of what they argued would be seen as American weakness if the Communists conquered Formosa. They called for considering ways to "neutralize" the island using only symbolic force (FRUS, 1950, VI: 349-351 and FRUS, 1950, I: 314-316; for a critique see FRUS, 1950, VI: 347-349). However, it goes too far to claim that "Korea was more the occasion for U.S. intervention [in Formosa] than the reason for it" (Buhite, 1978: 440). The Joint Chiefs still felt that U.S. military resources were too scarce to warrant their use to defend Formosa, and Acheson stood by his earlier rebuttal of their arguments for lesser measures on the grounds that they would buy only a little time at the cost of "substitut[ing] ourselves for the Soviets as the imperialist menace to China" (FRUS, 1949, IX: 377, 461-467). Without a sharp change in the international situation, it seems likely that the administration would have allowed Formosa to fall and would have sought to avoid policies that would have increased Sino-American enmity and Sino-Soviet solidarity.

NSC-68

In the autumn of 1949 the Soviet nuclear test and the fall of China produced gloomy reassessments. While they did not produce the

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characteristics mentioned at the start of this article which we have come to associate with the essence of the cold war, they did prepare the ground for changes by heightening the sense of a dangerous gap between the threat facing the United States and its defense efforts. Although the fears remained vague, many felt that Russian aggressiveness was increasing. The replacement of Kennan by Nitze as director of the Policy Planning Staff in early 1950 was a sign of the change in mood. In February the latter argued that

> recent Soviet moves reflect not only a mounting militancy but suggest a boldness that is essentially new—and borders on recklessness. . . . Nothing about the moves indicates that Moscow is preparing to launch in the near future an all-out attack on the West. They do, however, suggest a greater willingness than in the past to undertake a course of action, including the possible use of force in local areas, which might lead to an accidental outbreak of general military conflict [FRUS, 1950, I: 145-146].

For Nitze and others on the Policy Planning Staff, the chance of war "seemed considerably greater than [it did] last fall" (FRUS, 1950, I: 143). The Moscow Embassy was alarmed, even if its view was hedged:

> Moscow is steering a course as close as possible to full-scale war short of actually precipitating it. The danger that war may occur through Soviet miscalculation will in circumstances doubtless grow considerably but the probability that the Kremlin is still far from considering itself ready for global warfare is supported by most of the available evidence [FRUS, 1950, I: 293; as usual Kennan dissented—see FRUS, 1950, I: 127-129, 160-167].

The sense that the old policies could not cope with the increased dangers led Truman to commission the major reevaluation that appeared as NSC-68. Its central argument was that "when our military strength is related to the world situation and balanced against the likely exigencies of such a situation, it is clear that our military strength is becoming dangerously inadequate" (FRUS, 1950, I: 261). Increases were needed in all kinds of American forces, but most significant was the call for an increased conventional capability, especially for the European theater. The authors denied that the current posture of the symbolic commitments of a treaty and a small number of American troops, coupled with American industrial might, was sufficient. Although it was not fully articulated, the underlying premise was one which later was to gain so much support—because the American threat to use strategic nuclear weapons in the event of a Soviet attack on Europe would lose credibility as the Soviet nuclear arsenal grew, so

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western conventional forces would have to grow to match those of the other side. Furthermore, having to liberate Europe after Soviet conquest, always very costly, now was impossible because the Soviet nuclear weapons would enable them "to prevent any Allied 'Normandy' type amphibious operations" (FRUS, 1950, I: 250).[7]

Although no estimates were provided, this program required German rearmament and a vast increase in U.S. defense spending. As the document put it: "Budgetary considerations will need to be subordinated to the stark fact that our very independence as a nation may be at stake." The "decisive program to win the peace and frustrate the Kremlin design . . . would probably involve," among other things, "reduction of Federal expenditures for purposes other than defense and foreign assistance" and "increased taxes" (FRUS, 1950, I: 285). However, the formidable political barriers discussed earlier were still in place, and before Truman could have seriously considered such a drastic change there would have to be dramatic shifts in the domestic and foreign environments. The need for a new policy would have to seem imperative, not merely desirable, and domestic opinion would have to abandon the view that multiple commitments and high defense budgets were intolerable.[8] It is doubtful whether an event that changed either the possibility or the desirability of a new policy without affecting the other factor would have led to the implementation of NSC-68.

IMPACT OF THE KOREAN WAR

Korea altered U.S. foreign policy by three processes. On some issues it changed the domestic political climate and so allowed statesmen to do what they wanted to do before. In other cases (often hard to distinguish from the first), it resolved ambivalences in their minds. On a few issues it altered their beliefs.

7. The deliberations that produced NSC-68 involved long meetings with experienced consultants and the circulation of drafts to the Assistant Secretaries of State, but few of the comments that were received dealt with the central issues. The only searching critique, made after the document had been issued, came from the Bureau of Budget (FRUS, 1959, I: 298-306).

8. This is not to deny that there would have been political costs to rejecting a call for greater defense efforts. Thus, in his covering letter to a late draft of NSC-68, Under Secretary of State Webb stressed the need for "extraordinary security precautions. . . . If the President decides in the negative, no one in this Department will refer to that fact or talk about this study" (FRUS, 1950, I: 210-211).

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As we noted earlier, in the late 1940s most officials had a mixed, if not incoherent, view of the danger of war. Russia was seen as threatening but weak; expansionist but cautious. Korea led the former elements to dominate over the latter. As Secretary of Defense Johnson put it when testifying before Congress:

> The very fact of this aggression . . . constitute[s] undeniable proof that the forces of international communism possess not only the willingness, but also the intention, of attacking and invading any free nation within their reach at any time that they think they can get away with it. The real significance of the North Korean aggression lies in this evidence that, even at the resultant risk of starting a third world war, communism is willing to resort to armed aggression, whenever it believes it can win [U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations, 1950b: 272].

Acheson's perception was similar: "The profound lesson of Korea is that, contrary to every action preceding, the USSR took a step which risked—however remotely—general war" (FRUS, 1950, 1: 293; a general discussion of the alternative interpretations made by American leaders is presented by George, 1955: 209-232).[9]

When the Chinese joined the war, this impression was heightened. The CIA judged that the "Soviet rulers, in directing or sanctioning the Chinese Communist intervention, . . . must have appreciated the increased risk of global war and have felt ready to accept such a development. . . . They have resolved to pursue aggressively their world-wide attack on the power position of the United States and its allies, regardless of the possibility that global war may result" (FRUS, 1950, VII: 1309-1310; also see 1190). The greater danger made greater defense efforts necessary.

DEFENSE BUDGET AND NATO

The most important consequence of the war was the vast increase in the U.S. defense budget; without this most of the new policies would not

9. Of course, these inferences would not have been drawn had the decision makers not been predisposed to perceive high threat. Those with a different image of the Soviet Union, like Kennan and Bohlen, believed that the Soviet motives derived from local and particular factors that had only slight relevance for future Soviet behavior (FRUS, 1950, I: 361, also see 378; Bohlen, 1973: 292—but see FRUS, 1950, I: 342-343 for a contemporary memorandum by Bohlen that parallels Acheson's views). However, while the dominant faction's predispositions may have been a necessary condition for the heightened fear of war that developed, they were not sufficient and would not have led to the beliefs without the stimulus of the war.

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have been possible. Here both the first two processes were at work. Some administration officials, such as the authors of NSC-68, wanted a major budget increase before Korea. It is hard to determine Truman's position; indeed, he may not have known it himself. Since a drastic increase was politically impossible, he had no reason to think through his preferences. However, he probably accepted the general analysis of the threat presented in NSC-68 and wanted more defense spending than the political climate allowed. If he did not, Korea altered his views; thus, the case for the general argument of this article is even stronger.

Korea produced public support for a greatly enlarged budget because the Communist threat seemed more vivid and a great deal of money was needed to maintain the troops fighting in Korea. Furthermore, once the budget smashed through the old ceiling and the economy did not fall apart, much of the resistance collapsed. It was therefore possible to act on the heightened sense of threat.

The second important change was the militarization of NATO; the transforming of a paper organization built on a symbolic American commitment to a force capable of resisting Soviet attack. Here, too, Korea resolved the ambivalence felt by many decision makers and permitted the adoption of a policy that some of them had already come to favor. NSC-68 argued that because the Russians were willing to run significant risks in order to expand, and because they would soon have a significant nuclear stockpile, the West needed the capability for conventional defense. Korea appeared to prove this point—the Russians had tried to gain a small prize in spite of America's atomic weapons and mobilization base; would they not be tempted to gain a much greater one unless the local imbalance were corrected? (See Stebbins, 1951: 244.) Furthermore, Korea was an unpleasant reminder of the deficiencies of having to mobilize an army after the war had started. Allied forces were nearly pushed off the peninsula before adequate reinforcements could arrive, and the same thing could happen in Europe.

The remedy was more American troops in Europe, greater contributions from Britain and France, German rearmament, and a functioning infrastructure. The first meeting of the NATO Council after the start of the war agreed to develop a large army, and three months later a central headquarters was established. By the end of the year the position of Supreme Commander of NATO forces was created; General Eisenhower filled it; the U.S. and French troops in Germany were placed under his command, and the U.S. pledged itself to maintain at least six divisions in

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Europe; "forward defense," long desired by many, was now actively sought.

These efforts could not succeed without an increased European contribution. The Europeans were willing to promise to increase their defense spending and to agree in principle to German rearmament, not so much because they thought it was feasible or necessary to defend Europe, but because they wanted to deepen the American commitment (Rosecrance, 1968: 140-141). American peace-time involvement in Europe was still subject to debate within the United States and the Europeans had reason to fear that it could be reversed by a new administration. To prevent this was worth a significant expenditure of funds and, for all but France, the slight risk that Germany would turn out to be more of a threat than Russia.

The start down the road toward German rearmament had two unintended effects. First, it solidified the division of Germany. The prospect of German rearmament made the Soviet Union more willing to make concessions to avoid this outcome. However, once the West embarked on the new course, it would not be deflected by the possibility of securing its goal of protecting Europe through a different route. Second, if the Russians were not contemplating an attack on Western Europe, they probably believed their intentions were apparent and so could not accept the American explanation that its strengthened military position was needed for defense. Rearmament would then be seen by the Soviets as designed to threaten them, thus making the later relaxation of tensions more difficult.

LIMITED WAR AND THE SPREAD OF U.S. COMMITMENTS

Korea showed that limited wars were possible. Conventional forces, either American or local, were needed if similar cases recurred. Of course, it is better to avoid limited wars than to have to fight them, and in this Korea provided important lessons. By strongly implying that it would not defend Korea (in large part because decision makers did not think an attack there would be an isolated one), the United States had invited attack. It would not make the same error in the future; it would extend commitments to threatened areas, stake its reputation on meeting force with force, and thereby deter adventurism. SEATO, CENTO, and permitting Greece and Turkey to join NATO thus followed. (For a contrary view see Kuniholm, 1980: 423-425).

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The greater stress on the importance of commitments and credibility both fed and was fed by the development of the domino theory, which argued that American and Soviet actions in unimportant parts of the world were important because they had ramifications for other countries, other issues, and other conflicts. The crucial link between widely scattered events was Soviet beliefs about American resolve. To retreat in one dispute was to show that the United States would not stand firm in others, even if the substance of the two issues was different. This view came easily because of the memory that Hitler had undertaken a series of aggressions, each one bolder and of greater intrinsic importance than the last, because he thought his opponents would never fight, and was presented in muted form before June 1950. However, it took Korea to bring it to full development.

If the domino theory explained why it was important to prevent even small forceable changes in the status quo, the emerging theory of deterrence explained why it was possible to do so. This theory argues that when war is the worst possible outcome for both sides, a state can prevail by committing itself to stand firm—by staking its reputation on not giving in. This tactic works because a state which retreats from a commitment not only sacrifices the issue in dispute but endangers its position on other issues by undermining the value of its pledges. Because this cost is great, a state can credibly promise to protect another even if the other's inherent value to the state is less than the cost of carrying out the promise to protect it. It was then possible for the United States to extend a protective umbrella over much of the globe with a good chance that it would not be called upon to fight. Thus, the military requirements for the policy were not prohibitive. (This analysis was not accepted by the military, which argued that commitments should not exceed the capability to fulfill them; FRUS, 1950, I: 353. Acheson also took this position at times—see FRUS, 1950, I: 345.)

PERCEPTIONS OF A SINO-SOVIET BLOC

The spread of U.S. commitments was accelerated by the changing image of China. In the first evening after the attack on Korea, Truman decided to interpose the Seventh Fleet between Formosa and the mainland without paying much attention to how the Chinese Communists might react.[10] With hindsight it is not surprising that they were

10. This had been suggested by John Foster Dulles in a memorandum written a month before the outbreak of the Korean War (FRUS, 1950, I: 314-316) and echoed by Dean Rusk (FRUS, 1950, VI: 349-351).

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enraged by the prospect of the indefinite continuation of an alternative regime which challenged their power and legitimacy, but the American leaders failed to understand the degree to which their actions harmed and threatened China. They therefore saw the increase in Chinese hostility not as an understandable reaction to what the United States had done, but as evidence of underlying Chinese enmity springing from a desire to harm U.S. interests. It is important to note that this judgment, while incorrect, is similar to those made by other decision makers under similar circumstances (Jervis, 1976: 69-72, 352-355). It is not evidence of disguised motives to see China as an enemy which would have produced the same perception in the absence of the war.

The Chinese entry into the war completed the process started in June. Again, American leaders did not see the degree to which their drive to the Yalu threatened Chinese security because they thought China knew that the United States was not a menace. As Acheson put it: "no possible shred of evidence could have existed in the minds of the Chinese Communists about the non-threatening intentions of the forces of the United Nations" (quoted in Spanier, 1965: 97). Since the Chinese counterattack then could not be seen as self-defense, the explanation had to be unprovoked Chinese hostility. Furthermore, for Dean Rusk, John Davies, and Edmund Clubb, the Chinese intervention served only Soviet interests and so showed that that country was controlled by Russia (FRUS, 1950, VII: 1080, 1088). Even if the Soviet Union had not ordered China to fight, the two countries clearly had parallel objectives and so would work together in the future. They were a bloc, and accretions of power to one of them aided the other.

This is not to argue that the United States would have had good relations with China had there been no Korean war. As we discussed above, by early 1950 the U.S. government saw China as a menace and was stiffening its position. Many wanted to prevent the fall of Formosa, and almost all sought to prevent Communist expansion in Southeast Asia. The administration was on the defensive, with the bulk of mobilized opinion against it, blaming it for the "loss of China" and wanting to take a stronger position against the new regime.[11] Furthermore, Acheson's expectations of Sino-Soviet friction were premature, given the range of policies toward China he had been contemplating.

Korea significantly altered U.S. policy most immediately in the new policy of protecting Formosa and in the increase in Sino-American

11. Indeed, domestic considerations are mentioned in the diplomatic documents dealing with relations with the new regime, a very rare occurrence (FRUS, 1948, VIII: 682, 768-769, 781).

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hostility that followed. Many Republicans strongly argued that the administration was repudiating its earlier position (Caridi, 1968: 33-44; Purifoy, 1976: 198-200). While this view partakes of partisan exaggeration, it underscores the shift that had occurred, which was different in kind from the other changes we have discussed. If the decision makers were "ahead" of public opinion on the issues of the defense budget and NATO, they were "behind" it on China. The Korean war, and the Chinese entry into it, both increased the administration's need for domestic support and convinced decision makers that China was deeply and ineradicably hostile to the United States. Even without this shock, Sino-American relations would have been quite bad. However, the degree of the conflict and the related belief that China and Russia were inseparable were products of the war.

THE DIFFERENCE THE WAR MADE

By 1951 all the elements we have come to associate with the cold war were present or in train—high defense budgets, a militarized NATO, the perception of a Sino-Soviet bloc, the belief that the world was tightly interconnected and that any Communist victory anywhere would threaten vital American interests. These were changes that drastically altered world politics. It is clear that Korea triggered them, but it is less clear that they would not have occurred without that event. When someone asked McGeorge Bundy about the role played by the attack on Pleiku in the U.S. decision to bomb North Vietnam, he replied, "Pleikus are streetcars" (quoted in Hoopes, 1969: 30), implying that if you wait awhile, one will come along. In other words, there were many possible substitutes for the event and so the outcome would have been the same had it not occurred. However, I would argue that there were no likely substitutes for Korea.

Of course, we can never prove this point, since it involves a counterfactual. But it is hard to believe that the foreign and domestic resistances to the new policies could have been overcome without a dramatic shock. The changes were not likely to come incrementally. Kolko and Kolko (1973) argue that in early 1950 the administration faced "the real dilemma of obtaining congressional approval to implement the $15 billion or more recommendations of NSC-68 as well as European rearmament" (1973: 561). As Truman knew, there was little

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chance that this "dilemma" could have been overcome, and he had no intention of destroying his political credibility by asking for such an unrealistic sum. In the first edition of his *America, Russia, and the Cold War,* LaFeber says that NSC-68 "was being implemented" when the Korean War began (LaFeber, 1967: 90). This assertion was incorrect and in later editions LaFeber makes the much weaker claim that NSC-68 "was ready for implementation" when the war started (LaFeber, 1976: 97). Although it is often said that Truman approved the document when it was presented to him in the spring, in fact he sent it to the relevant departments for estimates of how much the program would cost, approving it only in September (Etzold and Gaddis, 1978: 384; FRUS, 1950, I: 400). Without the war, the administration probably would have sought to increase the budget to $17 or $18 billion (Huntington, 1961: 53; Smith, 1972: 162). Since it was only $13.5 billion to start with, this would have been a major move which might not have succeeded. But it was nothing like the sum needed for the new policy. As Acheson put it later: "Korea came along and saved us" (quoted in LaFeber, 1976: 100; also see McLellan, 1976: 272).

Could the decision makers have manufactured or exaggerated a crisis to transform U.S. policy? I think it unlikely. On some points, especially the change in China policy and the globalization of U.S. commitments, Korea did more than allow statesmen to do what they wanted to do all along. In many other areas the war clarified their attitudes and resolved ambivalences as well as creating the possibility for a new policy. Furthermore, even if the decision makers had been convinced of the need for the implementation of NSC-68, the amount of money required was such that most crises, even if manipulated by the administration, would not have been sufficient to call forth the necessary domestic support.

Decision makers can exaggerate the challenge posed by events, but they need good material to work with. There had to be a clear and present danger. A war was especially useful because once American troops were involved, the immediate threat to American lives would loom larger than the hypothetical danger to the economy. Furthermore, a war would unify elite and public opinion, at least in its initial stages. Unity and Republican support were needed not only to provide the necessary congressional votes but also to safeguard the Democratic Party against later recriminations. Given the GOP's opposition to high budgets and expanded executive power, such support would not be forthcoming in response to a manufactured crisis.

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POSSIBLE SUBSTITUTES

Even if the changes which took place after June 1950 required a dramatic stimulus, were there not many such events which could have substituted for Korea? The withdrawal of British aid for Greece and Turkey, the coup in Czechoslovakia, and the Berlin blockade had served similar functions in the past. However, these events were part of the process of sharpening the divisions in Europe. By 1950 this process was complete. There was little room for new European incidents, and indeed one cannot find incidents which occurred after 1949 that could have been substitutes for Korea.

Asia provided two possible candidates for this role—the fall of Formosa and the fighting in Indochina. Although segments of the Republican Party called for expanded aid to Chiang, it is not likely that the administration would have reversed itself, especially in light of the Joint Chiefs' position that protecting Formosa was not worth the necessary expenditure of scarce resources and the Republicans' hesitancy to call for American military involvement. Given the pressures on the administration, however, it is probable that a more anti-Chinese policy would have evolved after the fall of Formosa. However, there is no reason why this shift would have set off the other changes we have discussed, especially the much higher levels of defense spending and German rearmament. Increased Republican criticism was likely, but no one in the opposition party was calling for a program like that presented in NSC-68. Furthermore, the administration had refused to protect Formosa and so could hardly have used its fall as the basis for a drastic new policy.

A second possible substitute for Korea was Indochina. Until 1949 the United States had been torn between the desire to avoid being associated with colonial powers and the desire to strengthen France. After the fall of China increased the perceived costs of a victory for Ho Chi Minh, the United States recognized Bao Dai, supplied limited economic and military aid, and dispatched a military advisory group to Indochina. Underlying these moves was the belief that, in the words of NSC-64,

> It is important to the United States security interests that all practicable measures be taken to prevent further communist expansion in Southeast Asia. . . . The neighboring countries of Thailand and Burma could be expected to fall under Communist domination if Indochina were controlled by a Communist-dominated government. The balance of Southeast Asia would then be in grave hazard [FRUS, 1950, VI: 747; also see FRUS, 1950, III: 943-945).

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A State Department working group similarly argued: "Unavoidably, the United States is, together with France, committed in Indochina"—even though a year earlier the Department had explicitly denied this (U.S. Department of Defense, 1971: 152-153)—and concluded, "The whole of Southeast Asia is in danger of falling under Communist domination" (FRUS, 1950, VI: 714). Until Korea these strong words were accompanied by only limited action. As in Europe, there was a great gap between the description of the threat and the proposed remedies.

By 1954, of course, the United States seriously considered direct military intervention to prevent a Communist victory. While it is possible that this conflict could have become the vehicle for changing U.S. policy, two considerations make this unlikely. First, much of the American involvement followed and was at least partly caused by the Korean war. Once the United States became more anti-Chinese, defined the threat to its security more broadly, and had more funds available, it became both possible and necessary to try to halt the Viet-Minh. Before Korea, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who were in the forefront of those calling for a tougher policy against the Communists, opposed additional commitments. Although they welcomed the May 1950 decision to provide aid to Bao Dai, they were adamant that the United States not stretch its scarce military resources any thinner. Greater involvement in Indochina required greater funds, and in the climate of 1950 they were not likely to be forthcoming. Second, without extensive U.S. involvement, the fall of Indochina probably would not have produced the shock necessary to gain support for American rearmament. If China had sent troops in, the United States might have responded with force, as it did in Korea. However, since the Viet-Minh were capable of winning on their own, it is hard to imagine such a Chinese move.

A third possible substitute was the pressure of anti-Communist domestic opinion, cultivated by segments of the Republican party which attacked the administration for tolerating subversives in its midst. Before Korea, Harry Gold, David Greenglass, and the Rosenbergs had been arrested, Alger Hiss had been convicted, and Joseph McCarthy had announced that he knew that many Communists were employed by the State Department. Truman defended himself and instituted his own loyalty program, but the attacks increased. The question relevant here is whether McCarthyism could have transformed U.S. foreign policy. This seems unlikely. Truman's critics concentrated their fire on what they saw as domestic subversion and the administration's inadequate response, not on the problems outlined in NSC-68. Although they

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wanted to aid Chiang, they did not favor higher spending and a general extension of foreign commitments, nor did they call for the ability to fight limited wars. Even had their power grown (and much of the influence they gained after June 1950 may have been caused by the frustrations Americans experienced in fighting an inconclusive limited war), it is difficult to see how the result would have been the sort of foreign policy that followed Korea. The administration would not have been likely to have tried to divert public opinion by implementing the NSC-68 program—without a crisis, the support needed for the program would not have been forthcoming, and there was little reason for the administration to believe that putting it into effect would diminish McCarthyism (in fact, it was not diminished by the post-Korea foreign policy changes).

Finally, we should note that the traditional explanation of the cold war, which affirms the validity of Truman's view that Korea was a Soviet-designed test of American resolve, implies that there were several possible substitutes for Korea. In the absence of this war the Soviets would have picked another battleground. The United States would have had to fight and rebuild its position, as it did after Korea, if it was to prevent the Russians from dominating the globe. A full examination of this theory is beyond the scope of this article, but we should note that it is one that few historians now defend. Even if the war was planned by Russia—which is hotly disputed—the cause was linked to the local context. Had it not occurred, it is not likely that the Russians would have posed an armed challenge to the United States elsewhere.

ACCIDENTS AND THEORIES

Korea, then, was an important accident; important because it had major consequences, and an accident because it is not explained by the variables that are crucial to any of the alternative explanations of the cold war. Korea by itself cannot explain the American reaction. Without the desires, fears, and predispositions discussed above, the United States would not have implemented the policies we associate with the height of the cold war. The preexisting factors, however, were not sufficient to produce these policies. It is easy to imagine a world possessing all the important elements that were present in our pre-1950 world but in which the Korean war did not occur. The later history of this world would sharply diverge from that of ours.

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This casts doubt on any theory which implies that the main characteristics of the international politics of the 1950s and 1960s were the product of factors deeply rooted in the international system or the American polity. It is this implication of our argument that makes this article more than an attempt to provide an accurate account of historical events. For if Korea produced such crucial aspects of the cold war as high defense budgets, a militarized NATO, and the spread of American commitments, and if Korea was an accident, then the imperatives of bipolarity or the U.S. domestic system are not a sufficient explanation for much of the cold war. The United States and the USSR may have been "enemies by position" (to use Aron's phrase), but this did not require much that we have come to associate with bipolarity, especially the globalization of commitments and the viewing of most local conflicts as tests of strength between the superpowers.

Similar problems arise with those theories that stress the needs not of the international system but of the American internal politicoeconomic system. Thus, according to Ambrose,

> By June 1950, a series of desperate needs had come together. Truman had to have a crisis to sell the N.S.C. 68 program; Chiang could not hold on in Formosa nor Rhee in South Korea without an American commitment; the U.S. Air Force and Navy needed a justification to retain their bases in Japan; the Democrats had to prove to the McCarthyites that they could stand up to the communists in Asia as well as in Europe. The needs were met on 25 June 1950 [Ambrose, 1971: 195].

In the same vein, Kolko and Kolko argue, "A society's goals, in the last analysis, reflect its objective needs." Since America is capitalist, these goals have "always reflected the class structure and class needs." By the spring of 1950 the economy was faltering and American control over Western Europe was in danger. "Other means having failed, the only acceptable continuous government expenditure for an orthodox capitalist economist—and politically for Congress—was for armaments." "The artificial stimulus of rearmament needed as its rationale a crisis somewhere in the world if Washington was to resolve its . . . dilemma" (Kolko and Kolko, 1972: 19, 473, 476). As we saw, LaFeber initially argued that NSC-68 "was being implemented" when the Korean war broke out. Were this to have been the case, the argument for revisionism or for the compelling nature of a bipolar system would be stronger. However, this was not the case, and without Korea such implementation was unlikely. The "objective needs" would not have been met, thus showing that they can at best be only part of the explanation for the

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resulting policy. Without denying the significance of the domestic and systemic factors that brought the United States to the point where it was ready for the post-Korea policy, we should also see that these factors did not determine the course of the cold war. There is often a disproportion between the impact of an event and the general importance of its causes. It may be less intellectually satisfying—at least to political scientists—to argue that events which cannot be traced to broad factors deeply rooted in situation can strongly influence the course of history, but Korea seems to be such a case.[12]

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12. Kagan (1969: 351-354) makes an argument parallel to the one here in asserting that several of the events preceding the Peloponnesian War had few substitutes. It should also be noted that studies from psychology indicate that people systematically overestimate the inevitability of events (Fischhoff, 1975: 288-299).

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ERRATUM

In Jeffrey Z. Rubin et al.'s article entitled "Factors Affecting Entry into Psychological Traps" published in the September 1980 (Volume 24 Number 3) issue of the *Journal of Conflict Resolution,* a line was inadvertently omitted. On page 410 the final sentence of the first paragraph should read:

> "The owner of an old car in need of repair can keep the vehicle in working order only so long as the car is repaired whenever it is in need of work; similarly, a caller placed on hold at a pay phone can continue to wait only so long as additional money is inserted every few minutes."

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