



JUNE 2011

# ESTABLISHING THE SECRETARY'S ROLE JAMES FORRESTAL



COLD WAR FOREIGN POLICY SERIES

SPECIAL STUDY 1

Jeffrey A. Larsen and Erin R. Mahan

Historical Office  
Office of the Secretary of Defense

*Cover Photo:* James Forrestal sworn in as the first Secretary of Defense by Chief Justice Fred Vinson on September 17, 1947. Top ranking civilian and military officials witnessing the ceremony include: General Dwight D. Eisenhower, John L. Sullivan, Admiral Chester Nimitz, Senator Stuart Symington, Major General Alfred M. Gruenther, and Thomas J. Hargrave.

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**Establishing the Secretary's Role:  
James Forrestal**



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## JAMES FORRESTAL

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Published for the Historical Office  
Office of the Secretary of Defense  
by National Defense University Press

June 2011

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# Foreword

Former Secretary of Defense Harold Brown recently quipped in an interview with the Historical Office of the Secretary of Defense that “in most Secretaries of Defense, there is a Secretary of State inside striving to break out.” That foreign policy consumes a large portion of the Secretary of Defense’s time is not surprising—especially from the vantage point of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. Without some notion of foreign threats and challenges, the Secretary and his staff would operate virtually in the dark when considering such crucial and contentious matters as the scale and scope of research and development for new weapons, the procurement of equipment and supplies, the allocation of resources among the Services, and the general size and readiness of the Armed Forces. Although the foreign affairs aspect of defense policy and management did not typically receive much public attention in the early decades of the Department of Defense, it has certainly become an omnipresent factor that cannot be ignored. Today more than ever, foreign affairs goes to the very essence of defense and military policy.

The Cold War inspired and influenced the growth and evolution of the Secretary of Defense’s role in foreign affairs. Occupying a position created by the National Security Act of 1947 to further unification of the military Services, the Secretary of Defense joined the President’s Cabinet at a time when the Soviet Union was becoming the overarching concern of American foreign policy. Cold War national security problems would remain paramount for the next four decades, dwarfing and subsuming nearly all international issues. For the Department of Defense, the superpower conflict had boundless consequences. Not only did it drive the growth of military budgets and the expansion of weapons acquisition projects, but it also provided the conceptual framework for the development

of military strategy and tactics, the cementing of friendships and alliances with other countries, and the extension of American military power on a global scale.

Yet to view the Secretary's job as a product of Cold War politics alone is to overlook why Congress and the executive branch both pressed for creation of the position in the first place: to assume the managerial burdens that a large and unified defense establishment with postwar international obligations was expected to generate. And at the time, the types of threats that dominated U.S. thinking had less to do with the potential danger posed by Soviet communism than with avoiding a repetition of the recent experiences of the 1930s and World War II. Well before relations with the Soviet Union turned sour, it was clear that the United States was destined to take a larger and more active part in world affairs. It was to help the President cope with similar situations in the future that Congress gave him a deputy in the form of a Secretary of Defense to exercise unified "direction, authority, and control" over the Armed Services.

While the dangers of Soviet communism have passed, threats posed by nuclear proliferation, international terrorism, ethnic and religious violence, environmental pollution, illegal drug trafficking, long-term low-intensity conflicts in Southwest Asia, and other problems over the horizon will continue to focus American attention on events abroad. The role of the Secretary of Defense in foreign affairs is unlikely to diminish in the years ahead and could very well increase in the face of a more varied array of dangers and threats from abroad. Historical analysis helps put these problems in perspective.

This first series of studies by the Historical Office of the Secretary of Defense emphasizes the Secretary's role in the policy process—the interaction of individuals and institutions—and how the position evolved between 1947 and the early 1990s with the collapse of the Soviet Union. The study presented here is by no means meant to

be a comprehensive or detailed look at the Secretary's involvement in foreign affairs. But as a member of the President's cabinet and the National Security Council charged with managing the largest and most complex department in the government, the Secretary of Defense routinely participates in a variety of actions that affect the substance and conduct of American affairs abroad. More influential at some times than at others, the Secretary of Defense has consistently been a key figure among the President's senior advisors. But the role and impact of the Secretary of Defense, unlike those of the Secretary of State, are little studied and less well understood.

This series of special studies by the Historical Office begins an ongoing effort to highlight various aspects of the Secretary's mission and achievements. We begin with a nine-part series on the role of the Secretary of Defense in U.S. foreign policymaking during the Cold War. This series began as a book manuscript initially written by Dr. Steven Rearden, author of *The Formative Years, 1947–1950*, in our *Secretaries of Defense Historical Series*. I wish to thank Dr. Jeffrey Larsen for his efforts in turning this previously unpublished manuscript into the first of a series of special studies on the Secretary of Defense. Thanks also to OSD Graphics for designing the cover and formatting the special studies series, and to the editorial team at National Defense University Press for their support.

We anticipate that future study series will cover issues surrounding weapons of mass destruction, the special relationship with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, the economics of defense, and other topics. We invite you to peruse our other publications at <http://osdhistory.defense.gov>.

Erin R. Mahan  
Chief Historian  
Office of the Secretary of Defense



## **Executive Summary**

When James Forrestal became the first Secretary of Defense in September 1947, he had no staff, no organization chart, no manual of procedures, no funds, and no detailed plans. The only guidance he received regarding his role in U.S. foreign policymaking was phrased in generalities in the newly passed National Security Act of 1947. It would be up to Forrestal to set the precedents that successor Secretaries would follow. His interest in foreign policy and ensuring that the defense establishment had a say in that policy would set the course for decades to come.

As a former Secretary of the Navy during a world war and a student of history, Forrestal realized that the American military's role in foreign affairs had always been ambiguous. Despite a history of military separation from policymaking, the emergence of the United States as a world power toward the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century brought pressure on the government to give the military a larger and more distinct voice in foreign affairs. By the end of World War II, there had emerged a policymaking environment substantially different from anything the United States had experienced before. The war had thrust the military into the forefront of the policy process, and the coming Cold War seemed destined to perpetuate the military's influential role in American politics and foreign policy.

Not everyone agreed, however, that this was necessarily a good development. Generalized fears of militarism inspired efforts to ensure civilian control over the U.S. defense establishment. The issue was the extent to which military leaders should be included and in what form of representation. This matter, as well as the question of Service unification, led to the compromises found in the National Security Act of 1947, creating the new position of Secretary of Defense overseeing the military departments. One of

the leading spokesmen for continued Service independence had been Secretary of the Navy James Forrestal. President Harry S. Truman may have tapped him to be the first Secretary of Defense to co-opt him into the compromise solution adopted into law. Forrestal was able to push his concept of a National Security Council (NSC) with the President, but the two of them did not agree on its need or purpose.

Implementing the National Security Act would have been a challenge under any circumstances, but doing so at a time of a vast postwar demobilization, conversion to a peacetime economy, and increasing international tensions that accompanied the rise of a new Soviet threat made it even more difficult. Forrestal became more and more involved in foreign policy decisions during this period, despite a small staff. To provide a united position on U.S. political-military policy, he found it important to maintain close relations with the Secretary of State. A seemingly endless series of crises abroad, rising international tensions, and concern over a domino effect from Soviet expansionist tendencies all had one thing in common: the potential to involve the U.S. military at a time when its capabilities were stretched to the limit. This led Forrestal to focus on correcting two major problems: military readiness and the need for a comprehensive and systematic plan of national security that would bring foreign policy and military planning into closer harmony. Determined to establish a rational basis for the distribution of funds to the military services, he regarded the NSC as the proper place to make that determination.

Forrestal viewed himself not merely as another executive department head, but rather as a coordinator with government-wide interests and responsibilities. He took seriously the charge he received from the President to serve as his principal national security advisor. As the first Secretary of Defense, he established procedures still in use today, and he championed the establishment of an integrated national security strategy reflecting both foreign and defense policy. The President, however, did not agree with Forrestal's view

of the NSC as a “super-cabinet.” Truman wanted a Secretary who would enforce discipline among the Services, operate the Pentagon as efficiently as possible, and not wander too far into other arenas, including foreign policy, which he considered a secondary function of the job. Although he respected Forrestal’s ability, Truman was openly at odds with him over key issues such as the running of the NSC, military spending, custody and control of atomic weapons, and policy toward Palestine and China. The more they disagreed, the more apparent it became that Forrestal’s departure was only a matter of time. Forrestal resigned in March 1949.





Shortly after being named the country's first Secretary of Defense on September 17, 1947, James Forrestal confided his doubts and misgivings to his friend Robert Sherwood. "This office," Forrestal said, "will probably be the greatest cemetery for dead cats in history."<sup>1</sup> He was referring mainly to the enormous administrative chores he was likely to face, ones larger and more complex than those confronting any other member of the President's cabinet. But he also had in mind the burden of global responsibilities that would inevitably accompany the position. Chief among these would be advising the President on providing the necessary military support for the nation's foreign policy. With troubles threatening in Italy, the Middle East, Korea, and Central Europe, and with relations between Washington and Moscow deteriorating, the job confronting Forrestal took on an added sense of urgency. Foreign affairs, though perhaps not a specific part of his duties, would indeed loom large during Forrestal's tenure and for every Secretary of Defense thereafter.

When Forrestal became the first Secretary of Defense, he had no staff, no organization chart, no manual of procedures, no funds, and no detailed plans. Though he expected—indeed, intended—to take an active part in foreign policy, the only guidance on what his role might be was his own intuition and the recently passed National Security Act, which stated nothing, general or specific, about the role of the Secretary of Defense in foreign policy. It would take time and experience to clarify his responsibilities in this as in other areas of his new job. Although Forrestal would see some of his expectations fulfilled, he would experience no small number of surprises as well.<sup>2</sup>

## **Background: The Limits of the U.S. Military in Foreign Policy Formulation**

One of the main problems Forrestal faced—a problem he knew well from his service as Secretary of the Navy—was that throughout American history, the military’s role in foreign affairs had always been somewhat ambiguous. For the first century or so of the country’s existence, because of the Founding Fathers’ concern to exercise close civilian control, the military rarely involved itself in matters of foreign policy except in wartime or when directed to do so by the President. The emergence of the United States as a world power toward the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century brought with it pressures to give the military a larger and more distinct voice in foreign affairs. Much of the impetus for doing so came from imperialists who considered military power the key to America’s future in a world increasingly dominated by competing empires. Serving as Assistant Secretary of the Navy in 1897, Theodore Roosevelt declared, “Diplomacy is utterly useless where there is no force behind it; the diplomat is the servant, not the master of the soldier.”<sup>3</sup> During the war against Spain a year later, imperialism triumphed and left the United States in possession of a far-flung empire, stretching from Puerto Rico in the Caribbean to the Philippines in the Western Pacific. America’s emerging status as an industrial power at the turn of the century meant that the United States was a force to be reckoned with in international politics. With proliferating interests overseas and colonies to defend, something had to be done to bring policymaking and military planning into closer harmony. The initial step in this direction was the creation in 1903 of the Joint Army and Navy Board, the first interservice strategic planning body in U.S. history. Its chairman and dominant influence until his death in 1917 was Admiral of the Navy George Dewey, hero of the battle of Manila Bay during the Spanish-American War. Under Dewey’s oversight, the board generated a series of color-coded contingency war plans.<sup>4</sup>

The Joint Army and Navy Board never lived up to the expectations of some of its more ardent supporters that it would provide integrated strategy and policy. During Woodrow Wilson's presidency, sentiment in the White House and Department of State was often antimilitary to the point of disregarding the Joint Board almost entirely. Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan, a near-pacifist, roundly condemned any military involvement whatsoever in foreign policy, declaring at one point during a flare-up of tensions with Japan that "army and navy officers could not be trusted to say what we should or should not do till we actually get into war."<sup>5</sup> Although President Wilson never went quite so far, he was uncomfortable dealing with the military and kept foreign policy under exceedingly close personal control, sometimes even typing crucial correspondence himself so as to preserve confidentiality. U.S. intervention in World War I required that the Armed Forces take on added responsibilities, especially in coordinating the war effort with the British and French allies. But with the return of peace and the swift demobilization, the military reverted to its accustomed role.<sup>6</sup>

The interwar years saw little change in this situation until external events again applied the necessary stimulus. By the 1930s, it was clear that with the world political situation deteriorating, the United States might soon find its relative isolationism untenable and have to become more directly involved in world affairs. The passage by Congress of the Neutrality Acts notwithstanding, President Franklin D. Roosevelt gradually distanced himself from America's traditional policy of noninvolvement and moved steadily closer to a stance of collective security aimed at containing German and Japanese aggression. This in turn revived interest in the need for closer coordination of strategy and policy and led in 1938 to the creation of the Standing Liaison Committee, composed of the Under Secretary of State, the Chief of Staff of the Army, and the Chief of Naval Operations. However, the committee met irregularly, had no support staff, and confined its activities mostly to the exchange of information, not the development of recommendations. Although

useful to a point, the Standing Liaison Committee fell well short of being able to provide the coordination of policy and strategy that would soon be required. But it offered a portent of the type of institutional mechanism that would provide for military insertion into foreign policy decisionmaking.<sup>7</sup>

## **The Impact of World War II**

Pearl Harbor dramatically underscored the lack of American preparedness. Not only did it point up America's vulnerability to surprise attack, it also exposed serious flaws in the military command and control network and in intelligence-gathering and analysis. As part of his response to the emergency, President Roosevelt in January 1942 replaced the Joint Board with a stronger body of senior Service officers, the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), to oversee the planning of strategy on a unified basis, to provide liaison with the British, and to act as his principal wartime military advisory council. In addition, as a "supporting agency" for the Joint Chiefs, Roosevelt authorized creation of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), a broad-based intelligence organization that would go on to prove remarkably successful at combining political research and analysis with propaganda, subversion, and commando operations.<sup>8</sup>

Throughout the conflict, Roosevelt's priority of defeating the Axis meant that for the most part, wartime strategy and foreign policy were nearly one and the same. While the Department of State marked time until the end of the war, when presumably its authority and influence would return, Roosevelt and the JCS huddled together, mapping out strategy that would affect not only the course of the war but also the peace to follow. War aims were confined to a generalized statement of principles in the 1941 Atlantic Charter and the avowed objective, agreed to at the 1943 Casablanca Conference, of settling for nothing less than "unconditional surrender." Hoping to avoid a repetition of President Wilson's unfortunate experience with the Fourteen Points, Roosevelt refused to make promises of a peace settlement that he later might not be able to keep.<sup>9</sup>

The prosecution of war and necessary coordination with allies also exposed the armed Services to an intensive education in the realities of international politics. In contrast to their British counterparts, whose involvement in administering the empire had honed their political instincts, U.S. military officers had scant experience in foreign policy. With little or no formal training in international affairs, career professionals learned much of what they knew from earlier tours of duty overseas. Intent on prosecuting the war, they found it frustrating and counterproductive when U.S. allies did not seem to have the same goals, or when they appeared more interested in what the Americans considered diversions—hence, the rude awakening that General Dwight D. Eisenhower had in North Africa in having to negotiate with rival French factions, and the continuous sense of futility that dogged General Joseph Stilwell's efforts in China in trying to persuade Chiang Kai-shek and the Nationalists to become more active in the war against Japan.<sup>10</sup>

Larger problems lay over the horizon. The most significant were those connected with the development of a coalition strategy that needed Soviet as well as British agreement, and the formulation, however tentative, of postwar occupation plans for the defeated Axis. In preparation for the latter, the Allies late in 1943 authorized the creation of a European Advisory Commission (EAC), headquartered in London. The U.S. delegate, Ambassador John Winant, naturally looked to Washington for instructions, although it was not until November 1944 that his superiors established an organization, the State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee (SWNCC), to provide the guidance he needed. With a permanent support staff and working subcommittees, SWNCC was the closest entity yet to a truly interdepartmental policy planning body. Considered a major step forward by all involved, SWNCC served a dual purpose—not only did it recognize the military's involvement in foreign affairs, but it also gave the Department of State access to military planners, especially the Joint Chiefs.<sup>11</sup>

SWNCC's early activities, however, produced mixed results. The committee's most important initial task, which was to draft a directive for the occupation of Germany, was promptly taken over by Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau, Jr., who used his friendship with the President to lobby for harsher postwar treatment of the Germans than either the State or War Departments seemed inclined to mete out. But as the war neared an end, Roosevelt began looking again to State for advice and recommendations. By the time of the Yalta Conference in February 1945, State had recouped much of the influence it had lost to Treasury on German policy. But on April 12, 1945, Roosevelt died, taking with him whatever ideas he may have had for a peace settlement and throwing policymaking once more into question.<sup>12</sup>

It was left to Roosevelt's successor, Harry S. Truman, to bring the war to a successful military conclusion. And since Germany and Japan were both slated for military occupation, it followed that the authorities in the Pentagon would be involved in foreign affairs to one degree or another for some time to come. Yet as World War II drew to a close, not everyone agreed that this was a proper or desirable course for the country to follow. Many, including President Truman, looked askance at what they saw as a looming threat of militarism and went to considerable lengths in the immediate postwar period to assure and safeguard civilian control in two important areas: unification of the armed Services and control of atomic energy. But as a practical matter, there was no longer any question of excluding military spokesmen from policymaking and foreign affairs. The issue was instead how far they should be included, and in what form of representation. A more than vague notion that the Armed Forces were influential in foreign affairs was evident. But which institutions, policies, and practices would be needed to support that involvement was far from self-evident.<sup>13</sup>

## **National Security Act of 1947**

After World War II, the ongoing debate over the military's role in foreign policy became inextricably entangled with the question of Service unification. Although the war had repeatedly demonstrated the need for and value of unified direction and civilian control of the armed Services, it left them divided over how these lessons ought to be applied. Indicative of the prevailing uncertainty was the ensuing postwar controversy over Service unification, which, by and large, revolved around the relative merits of two competing plans. The first, developed by the War Department, advocated a single Secretary of Defense presiding over a closely centralized defense establishment modeled on the Army's general staff structure. The other, a Navy plan, stressed increased coordination in policy and planning, while leaving the military departments largely autonomous. The resulting compromise, enshrined in the National Security Act of 1947, incorporated distinct features from both plans but essentially established a confederation of the services, known as the National Military Establishment (NME), which drew more inspiration from the Navy's model than from the Army's.<sup>14</sup>

The leading spokesman for the Navy view was its civilian Secretary, James Forrestal. A successful Wall Street investment banker in private life, Forrestal came to Washington in 1940 to help President Roosevelt in the prewar mobilization effort. From that point on, he dedicated his life and career to public service, with a passion for national security affairs. His main objection to the War Department plan was that it made insufficient allowance for preserving the Navy Department's unique assets and proven contributions to national security. In particular, he thought it would threaten the continued independent operation of both naval aviation and the Marine Corps. He was also deeply distressed that it did not fully address what he saw as other urgent problems arising from the often haphazard management of resources in World War II and the absence of any top-level mechanism for politico-military coordination and

polymaking. With the United States increasingly involved in international affairs, Forrestal deemed it imperative that there be “a mechanism within the Government which will guarantee that this Nation shall be able to act as a unit in terms of its diplomacy, its military policy, its uses of scientific knowledge, and, finally, of course, in its moral and political leadership in the world.”<sup>15</sup>

In October 1945, with the Army’s proposals already on the table, Forrestal gave Congress an alternative plan for reorganizing the Armed Forces. Broader in scope than anything the War Department had put forth, the plan Forrestal endorsed drew heavily on the findings of a special Navy-sponsored study group headed by Ferdinand Eberstadt, a former business partner, Princeton classmate, and friend of Forrestal’s. Under the concept Forrestal recommended, unification took second place to the need for a general tightening of government-wide coordination for national security on a more permanent and far-reaching basis than anything yet tried. The military departments would remain separately administered entities, but they would concert their efforts through an array of interservice and interagency boards and committees. Sitting atop this structure would be the National Security Council (NSC), composed of the President as *ex officio* chairman along with the government’s most senior executive officials, acting as a kind of board of directors to provide overall policy guidance. By way of comparison, Forrestal frequently likened the NSC’s role to that of the British Government’s Committee on Imperial Defence. As Forrestal described it, the NSC would provide “formal organizational ties between the Department of State and the military departments,” and, at the same time, become the mechanism for “new and appropriate organizational forms fostering other relationships . . . vital to the preservation of our national security.”<sup>16</sup>

Critics, including members of Truman’s White House staff and analysts in the Bureau of the Budget, saw numerous flaws in this arrangement. Two complaints they voiced were that it would give the military an inordinately strong voice in policy, and that



it could lead to a usurpation of presidential power and authority. What Forrestal wanted, they contended, was a British-style cabinet government, in which policymaking would be the responsibility of a handful of senior officials making up the NSC. Reactions from the Department of State were similar. Indeed, as Secretary of State George C. Marshall saw it, the proposed NSC would “dissipate the constitutional responsibility of the president for the conduct of foreign affairs” and “inaugurate a critical departure from the traditional method of formulating and conducting foreign policy.” Unlike the Navy’s proposals, the War Department’s unification scheme made no mention of institutionalizing a military presence in foreign affairs and was therefore generally preferred by the Department of State.<sup>18</sup>

Despite reservations, Truman eventually accepted the need for an NSC, perhaps to make Service unification more palatable to the Navy. Going a step further to win that Service’s support, he also named Forrestal Secretary of Defense when Congress in July 1947 completed work on the National Security Act. Even so, Truman chose Forrestal only because his first choice—Secretary of War Robert Patterson, who strongly supported unification—turned down the job, electing instead to return to private life. While Truman endorsed the general idea of the NSC, he withheld judgment on how much he would actually use the council or participate in its deliberations.<sup>19</sup>

Thus, despite a genuinely sincere effort by both men to reconcile their differences, Truman and Forrestal remained basically at odds over the NSC. Given the President’s attitude, Forrestal assumed that if the NSC were to function at all, it would have to function as part of the National Military Establishment and be physically located in the Pentagon. Truman, however, sided with his White House counsel Clark Clifford and others on his staff who thought the NSC should be entirely separate from the defense establishment and under the White House.<sup>20</sup>

For executive secretary of the NSC, Forrestal persuaded Truman to appoint Sidney W. Souers, a St. Louis businessman who held the rank of admiral in the Naval Reserve. Souers had been on Forrestal's intelligence staff in World War II; after, he served briefly as director of the Central Intelligence Group, the immediate forerunner of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). Forrestal likened the executive secretary's role to that of a "buckle," forming a link between the military and civilian policymakers, probably with the expectation that Souers, because of his previous associations, would gravitate toward the military point of view. It did not turn out that way. Instead, Souers, who was Truman's confidant, made it clear from the beginning that he would act as liaison between the NSC and the President. Souers viewed his responsibilities as briefing the President on a daily basis, reviewing intelligence, and presenting policy options of the executive departments. While subsequent special assistants for NSC affairs would not be nearly so reticent about offering advice, all would agree that their primary role was as intermediary for the President.<sup>21</sup>

Although Forrestal had to accede to the President's wishes on the operation of the NSC, he did so reluctantly and with a premonition of future friction. "It is apparent," he recorded in his diary as the National Security Act was about to take effect,

*that there is going to be a difference between the [Bureau of the] Budget, some of the White House staff and ourselves on the National Security Council—its functions, its relationship to the President and myself. I regard it as an integral part of the national defense setup and believe it was so intended by the Congress.*<sup>22</sup>

Debate over the NSC to some extent clouded a larger and more fundamental issue: the role of the Secretary of Defense in national security matters and foreign policy. Although Congress in framing the National Security Act devoted considerable time and attention to discussing and defining the Secretary's duties, its main concern

throughout the debate was the Secretary's power and authority over the military in such areas as budgeting and eliminating waste and unnecessary duplication of effort in research and development, procurement, logistics, and other functions. Everything else Congress captured under a catch-all provision, Section 202(a), that made the Secretary of Defense "the principal assistant to the President in all matters relating to the national security."<sup>23</sup> Exactly where this language came from is unclear, but it obviously reflected Forrestal's belief—an outgrowth of his opposition to unification—that executive-level coordination, rather than management and direction of the military, should be the Secretary's first concern and the new law's central purpose.

Extending this line of thinking a step further, Forrestal hoped that his main duties as Secretary of Defense would revolve around running the NSC and its associated bodies and coordinating the development of high-level policy, leaving day-to-day defense administrative matters to the Service secretaries. Yet as Forrestal's chief biographers note in this regard, it was not long after the act took effect before he began to realize that he had made "a central and costly misjudgment."<sup>24</sup> Not only did it prove impossible for Forrestal to divorce himself from the details of running the defense establishment, but he also found Truman resolutely opposed to any bureaucratic changes that might impinge on the chief executive's constitutionally mandated responsibilities for policymaking.

## **Early Trials and Tribulations**

Implementing the National Security Act would have been an imposing task even in the best of circumstances. That it fell to Forrestal at a time of exceedingly unsettled conditions, both at home and abroad, made his job that much more difficult. The great demobilization of the Armed Forces that had fought and won World War II was officially over by 1947, but the problems the military faced of readjusting to peacetime were just beginning. In addressing the needs of reconversion, President Truman set three

priority tasks: to stem inflation, to balance the federal budget, and to reduce the public debt, which had been swollen by wartime expenditures and borrowing.<sup>25</sup> Although defense expenditures remained relatively high by prewar standards, it was clear that the almost free access to and control over resources that the military had enjoyed during the war were things of the past. With money again becoming tight, Forrestal faced the difficult problem of having to decide how and where to allocate limited funds for maximum effectiveness. Moreover, with less money available, Forrestal also had to contend with growing friction and competition among the Services as they endeavored to stake out claims to roles and missions that would legitimize their importance and thereby help to protect their budget shares. Adjudicating these rival claims would be, as it turned out, one of the new Secretary's most trying and least rewarding tasks.<sup>26</sup>

Coinciding with the readjustment to peacetime was an almost steady increase, from 1945 on, in diplomatic tensions between Washington and Moscow. As reaching agreements and settling problems with the Soviet Union became ever more difficult, Truman and most of his senior advisors grew skeptical of Soviet intentions. With memories of the interwar years still fresh, they feared that they might be seeing a repetition of the expansionism recently practiced by Nazi Germany, fascist Italy, and imperial Japan. In these circumstances, it was becoming apparent that a toughening of policy aimed at demonstrating that the United States had no intention of resorting to the ill-fated appeasement of the 1930s was only a matter of time.<sup>27</sup>

That demonstration came amid the crisis precipitated in February 1947 by Britain's announcement that it could no longer afford to support Greece or Turkey against Soviet-directed politico-military pressures. The ensuing 4 months witnessed a veritable revolution in U.S. foreign policy, starting with Truman's plea to Congress in March for the Greek-Turkish aid program, and culminating in June with Secretary of State George Marshall's offer, in his Harvard

commencement speech, of large-scale assistance to help Europe out of its economic ruin and political turmoil. Taken together, these initiatives—the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan—established the cornerstones for the doctrine of containment, the basic strategy behind American policy and attitudes toward the Soviet Union for the next four decades.<sup>28</sup>

Among the President's advisors, Forrestal had the reputation of being one of the most strident critics of Soviet behavior and one of the most persistent in urging Truman to adopt a tougher stance toward Moscow.<sup>29</sup> But as Secretary of Defense, he soon had his hands full with matters other than foreign policy. The freshly minted National Security Act had established a welter of agencies whose functions and organization still needed much sorting. Lest bureaucratic anarchy reign, Forrestal, as a principal sponsor of the new system, felt personally obliged to intervene and provide leadership, at least through the difficult start-up stage. Although Truman had, in effect, declared the internal workings of the NSC off limits to Forrestal, the Secretary of Defense found he had enough to do in organizing and shaping the new National Military Establishment. As he told the Finletter Commission in November 1947, he wanted to staff the NME and its associated bodies with "intelligent, efficient people who will all know the major plans and policies."<sup>30</sup> Finding such individuals, of course, took time and patience, draining his energy and attention from other, more substantive concerns.

A further limitation on Forrestal's ability to influence foreign policy at this time was the bare minimum of staff assistance available to him. As Secretary of the Navy during and immediately after the war, he had had ready access to a huge bureaucracy that included some of the most talented minds the country had to offer. But during the unification debate he had told Congress that, in the interests of preserving Service autonomy, it would be counterproductive for the new Secretary of Defense to surround himself with too many aides and assistants who might pry too deeply into the military

departments' affairs; a small staff, he contended, would suffice. Accepting this advice, Congress gave the Secretary of Defense none of the organizational support or perquisites common to other executive departments, but chose instead to limit him to three special assistants with vaguely defined powers and authority. The men Forrestal named to these positions—Marx Leva, to advise on legal and legislative matters; Wilfred McNeil, who oversaw the budget; and John H. Ohly, who took care of “all the rest”—were indeed gifted and dedicated public servants. But the tasks at hand quickly proved more than they could handle by themselves.<sup>31</sup>

Of the three, Ohly's job was at once both the most encompassing and the most directly involved in foreign affairs. If a problem was neither legal nor budgetary in nature, it probably wound up on Ohly's desk. Much of the work was routine, relating to staff and clerical help for the NME's numerous interservice committees and boards. But it also involved the supervision of special studies, military assistance policy, and liaison with the NSC, CIA, Department of State, and other agencies. Ohly's organization quickly expanded from a small coordinating office into a defense-wide clearinghouse for politico-military affairs, the forerunner of the important and influential Office of International Security Affairs of later years.<sup>32</sup>

Forrestal's own activities at this time were no less hectic and varied. In addition to overseeing unification, he set about purposefully to establish new relationships with old friends outside the defense establishment, especially at the Department of State. One aim, growing out of his activities as Secretary of the Navy, was to increase the military's knowledge and awareness of ever-changing conditions abroad. As an example, Forrestal made an effort to include one or the other of State's two most respected Soviet specialists, George F. Kennan and Charles “Chip” Bohlen, in meetings of the War Council (forerunner of the Armed Forces Policy Council) whenever defense matters with foreign policy implications were on the agenda.<sup>33</sup> Kennan was also director of State's main think tank, the Policy Planning Staff, and, as such,

often devoted himself to problems of long-range policy, an area of special interest to military planners. Having ready access to Kennan's and Bohlen's expertise was, of course, a demonstration of Forrestal's continuing preoccupation with the problems of communism and the Soviet Union. It also indicated, in a broader sense, the importance he attached to establishing and maintaining close State-Defense consultation wherever possible, a concern that not all of his successors would share.

Forrestal also recognized that it was no less important to shore up his relationship with Secretary of State Marshall, with whom he was on friendly, but not overly close, terms. Not only had they been on opposite sides during the unification debate, but also they had disagreed on policy toward China. In particular, Forrestal had questioned the wisdom of Marshall's decision, while serving as Truman's special emissary to China in 1946, to cut off military aid to Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist government in an effort to pressure it into a coalition with the Chinese Communists. Although the aid had since resumed, Forrestal worried that it would be a case of too little, too late. He thought that the United States, as Chiang's wartime ally, had an obligation to "continue to supply support and ammunition to the Central government," and said "that no matter how difficult the situation became we should not withdraw entirely from China."<sup>34</sup> Resisting the spread of communism in Asia, he believed, was no less important to U.S. security interests than resisting it in Europe. Broadly speaking, his views in this regard reflected sentiment throughout the defense establishment, a sign of deeper divisions yet to come between State and Defense over U.S. policy in Asia.

Despite their differences, however, Forrestal knew that he would need Secretary of State Marshall's help to fashion effective and workable policies under the new national security system. Not only did Marshall have Truman's total trust and highest admiration, but he also had numerous friends and contacts in foreign capitals and generated confidence abroad in the United States. Although having

Marshall's backing may not have been essential in every instance, Forrestal realized that without that support, his position and influence would be considerably weaker, especially in his dealings with Truman. It was therefore no surprise that in his most intense confrontation with the President—the showdown in the fall of 1948 over the fiscal year (FY) 1950 defense budget—Forrestal turned to Marshall when he found he needed help persuading Truman that the Pentagon should have more money.<sup>35</sup>

## **Developing a Concept of National Security**

Despite efforts by the Truman administration to anticipate future dangers, no one could have possibly foreseen the scale and scope of Cold War problems that would envelop the United States for the next four and a half decades. Yet even as early as 1947, it was clear that the United States faced an extraordinary situation demanding unprecedented responses. The Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan, while bold and innovative, were only the beginning. Although Forrestal's most immediate concern was to see to it, so far as he could, that the machinery of the National Security Act functioned smoothly, his thoughts were never far from what must have seemed an endless profusion of crises abroad. During his first 6 months as Secretary of Defense, he encountered a steady escalation of international tensions, highlighted by emergencies in Italy, Greece, Palestine, Central Europe, and elsewhere, all potential inroads for Soviet expansionism. Like many others in Washington, Forrestal accepted the domino theory—he worried that if one country fell to communism, others would follow. As he became increasingly absorbed with finding ways to counter this danger, Forrestal was more convinced than ever that foreign and defense policy were one and the same and should be addressed and handled accordingly.

While no two foreign problems were alike, all had one thing in common—a capacity for involving the United States militarily at a time when its capabilities were stretched to the limit. The potential for the deepest and most serious trouble seemed to be in



Palestine. In the fall of 1947, Truman—against the advice of both Forrestal and the Department of State—encouraged and endorsed the creation of a Jewish state, thus precipitating the ensuing Arab-Israeli conflict of 1948–1949. To Forrestal, it seemed that Truman had taken an unnecessary risk for purely political purposes—to curry favor with Jewish voters in the United States—though Truman’s decision was far more complicated than his Secretary of Defense perceived.<sup>36</sup> At the same time, Forrestal worried that the President’s action would alienate the Arab oil producers, open the door for Soviet penetration of the Middle East, and ultimately compel American military intervention in the interest of restoring peace and stability. The Joint Chiefs estimated that if the United States became involved in any Middle East peacekeeping mission, the cost and diversion of resources could be enormous—upward of 100,000 troops, plus air and sea support, raising the distinct possibility that the United States might have to resort to partial mobilization.<sup>37</sup>

Even if the United States avoided involvement in Palestine, there still remained the danger of crises and entanglements elsewhere. According to intelligence reports, unchecked economic deterioration, internecine strife, or communist-led guerrilla movements continued to threaten on a variety of fronts, with Italy, France, and Greece among the most troubled and vulnerable.<sup>38</sup> What to do, should conditions in these countries worsen, became a recurring topic on the NSC agenda from the fall of 1947 well into the next spring. Then, amid these deliberations in February 1948 came the Soviet-engineered coup that toppled the neutralist government in Prague, followed shortly thereafter by rumors of impending Soviet military action in Germany, the disruption of land traffic into Berlin, and finally, in June, the Soviet blockade that left Berlin dependent for its existence on an Allied airlift.

From this ominous sequence of events, Forrestal became convinced of two important points. One was the need for increased military readiness, which was at a postwar low around the beginning of 1948.

Although the Intelligence Community dismissed a Soviet attack on the West as unlikely, it could not rule out “some miscalculation or incident” that might accidentally trigger an East-West conflict.<sup>39</sup> Up to this time, Forrestal had been willing to risk what he termed (in his testimony before the Finletter Commission) “a somewhat understaffed military establishment” in the interests of a healthy economy at home and assistance for recovery abroad.<sup>40</sup> But in the aftermath of the Czech coup, with tensions escalating in Europe, he saw the need for accepting greater risks and came out in favor of a general strengthening of the Armed Forces. In March 1948, he and the Joint Chiefs put before Truman a list of recommended measures to bolster the nation’s sagging defense posture, including a supplement to the FY49 defense appropriation, reenactment of Selective Service, and the transfer of custody and control of nuclear weapons from the Atomic Energy Commission to the Armed Forces. Truman, while opposing any change in atomic custody and control procedures, did accept most of the rest of this package. But for fiscal reasons, he insisted on keeping the supplemental as small as possible, preferably around \$1.5 billion, as opposed to the \$9 billion the JCS sought. The resulting compromise of \$3.1 billion thus gave Forrestal and the chiefs some, but not all, of what they wanted, and was in many respects merely a rehearsal for the larger and more painful contest yet to come later in the year over the FY50 Defense budget. But as the whole episode indicated, America’s Cold War strategy was becoming increasingly dependent—to a degree probably never anticipated—on readily available military power.<sup>41</sup>

The other conclusion Forrestal drew from these experiences was that time was running out for the United States to develop a comprehensive and systematic plan of national security that would draw foreign policy and military planning into closer harmony. Although Forrestal had been championing such a plan almost from the moment he took office, his difficulties as Secretary of Defense in trying to forge agreement among the Services and between them and the President on the FY49 supplemental provided a strong added incentive. Something, Forrestal realized, had to be done to

curb the Services' free-for-all competition for funds and to establish a rational basis for the allocation of resources. He envisioned a policy blueprint setting forth foreign policy objectives, general and specific alike, in a way that would help him to determine military needs and allocate resources. "It seems to me," he argued, in urging the NSC to expedite action on such a paper:

*that our policy with respect to particular countries must take into account our interests throughout the world and our ability, as a practical matter, both from an economic and a military standpoint, to protect these various interests. In my opinion it is abundantly clear that priorities must be established, and this cannot be done rationally in the absence of a definitive world policy.*<sup>42</sup>

The NSC's first cut at this problem, a general report (NSC 7) on "Soviet-directed World Communism," was issued in late March 1948. Drafted by the council's staff with practically no guidance from senior officials, NSC 7 was a disappointment to all concerned. It was almost lost amid the turmoil over the war scare in Europe and the defense supplemental. Couched in generalities, the paper called for "a world-wide counter-offensive against Soviet-directed communism" backed by unspecified, but presumably large, increases in American defense spending, nuclear weapons production, foreign aid, and anti-communist propaganda.<sup>43</sup> Although Forrestal and the Joint Chiefs judged the paper a promising start, they considered its analysis and recommendations too vague and ambiguous to be of concrete use. State Department reactions were essentially the same.<sup>44</sup>

Dissatisfied by this initial effort, Forrestal turned to George Kennan and asked him and his Policy Planning Staff colleagues in the Department of State to try their hand at identifying "the basic premises" of U.S. foreign policy. "The difficulty about the matter," Forrestal told Kennan, "came from the fact that within the National Military Establishment—at all levels of authority—there

was still an element of confusion concerning our basic policy—with a considerable amount of pressure directed towards preparing a military organization with which to fight a war.”<sup>45</sup> Kennan had tackled similar problems for Forrestal before, most notably in early 1947, when, at Forrestal’s request, he had drafted a policy analysis of Soviet behavior that ended up being published as his celebrated “Mr. X” article on containment strategy in *Foreign Affairs*.<sup>46</sup> Even so, Kennan was invariably dubious of trying to reduce issues of the complexity Forrestal had in mind to writing. Personally and professionally, he put little credence in prescriptive policy papers and found their value exaggerated. But in apparent deference to his friendship with Forrestal, he agreed to look into the matter.<sup>47</sup>

The one in need of the most persuading was Truman, determined to hold the line on a defense budget not exceeding \$15 billion, worsening relations with the Soviet Union notwithstanding. Privately, at a meeting with Forrestal, Marshall, and other key advisors on May 21, 1948, the President readily acknowledged that insofar as Congress and the American public were concerned, it might be helpful to explain and clarify U.S. foreign policy objectives. His thinking at the time was that “four or five speeches” by Marshall and other senior officials—following the pattern of the year before, when the administration had introduced the Truman Doctrine and the European Recovery Program—would meet the problem.<sup>48</sup> A few weeks later, however, when Forrestal suggested that the NSC be charged with developing a statement of objectives, and that the resulting study be used in determining the military’s “size, character, and composition” in the soon-to-be-prepared FY50 budget, Truman grew wary.<sup>49</sup> In his response (written by James Webb, director of the Bureau of the Budget and one of Forrestal’s most persistent critics), Truman approved the project Forrestal proposed but cautioned that final decisions on any use of the study would be his alone, depending on unforeseen changes in the international situation and the economic outlook. “I do not feel,” Truman further advised, “that the preparation of the initial 1950 budget estimates can be delayed or based wholly on this effort.”<sup>50</sup>

Truman's caution was understandable. Although the value of a general policy statement may have been obvious to Forrestal, especially for budgetary planning purposes, it was much less attractive from Truman's perspective. What worried Truman and those close to him, like Webb, was the extraordinary power and control over the allocation of resources that the military might acquire through such a paper. Taken to its logical conclusion, Forrestal's approach would, in effect, let foreign policy drive military requirements and relegate fiscal and economic concerns to secondary importance. It could, conceivably, open the way for the Services to make huge budget demands and hand them a powerful instrument to justify almost any force posture they deemed appropriate. Such apprehensions did not mean that Truman would deny Forrestal the guidance he said he needed, or ignore whatever suggestions the NSC might have to offer. But they did reinforce Truman's conviction that the NSC should function only in an advisory capacity. Despite the unsettled and potentially volatile international situation, Truman decided to accept the risk of holding the line on military spending.

The upshot, after much hard bargaining all around, was a FY50 defense budget tailored to Truman's—not Forrestal's—preferences.<sup>51</sup> In an eleventh-hour attempt to persuade Truman to change his mind and lift the \$15 billion ceiling, Forrestal appealed to Secretary of State Marshall for support. Although reluctant to become involved in Forrestal's growing conflicts with Truman, Marshall eventually relented and agreed that a somewhat larger defense budget was "better calculated" to instill confidence among America's allies.<sup>52</sup> But neither Marshall's change of heart nor the NSC's adoption in late November 1948 of a basic national security policy paper (NSC 20/4), thus fulfilling Forrestal's request for guidance, did anything to alter Truman's thinking.

Indeed, if Forrestal ever had any hopes that NSC 20/4 would be the catalyst for an integrated foreign and defense policy, he must have been sorely disappointed. Engineered by Kennan

and the Policy Planning Staff, with inputs from the Intelligence Community, NSC 20/4 readily acknowledged that the Soviet Union posed a serious threat to U.S. security and that Moscow's ultimate aim was "domination of the world." Militarily, there was no question that the Soviet Union possessed superior numbers in men and equipment. Based on available intelligence, the report speculated that Soviet forces could, in a matter of months, overrun and dominate much of the Eurasian land mass, subject Britain to air and missile bombardment, and even launch a limited number of one-way air sorties against the United States. Yet as dangerous and threatening as Soviet military capabilities appeared, no signs existed that the Soviet Union was actively preparing to wage such a campaign.<sup>53</sup>

In fact, the more serious and immediate danger cited in NSC 20/4 came from the possibility of Soviet espionage, sabotage, and political subversion. Given the nature of these threats, the report saw no pressing need for increased military preparedness and urged "a level of military readiness which can be maintained as long as necessary." As part of this overall effort, NSC 20/4 cautioned against "excessive" armaments and recommended instead measures to strengthen the domestic economy and to promote economic and political stability abroad. In other words, lacking evidence of an imminent or even likely military confrontation, NSC 20/4 found no reason to question the adequacy of current defense policies for coping with Soviet expansionism. Nor did the paper explore what specific function military power should play in American foreign policy, other than to say that it should act "as a deterrent to Soviet aggression."<sup>54</sup> For this purpose, an integrated program of action may have had some advantages, but it was hardly necessary.

Not surprisingly, then, NSC 20/4 contributed little to producing a more comprehensive, systematic approach to national security. Nor did it result in any appreciable increase in the military's influence on policy, as some critics of the NSC system feared might happen. On the contrary, by minimizing the likelihood of an

East-West armed confrontation, it probably lessened the military's credibility in Truman's eyes and almost certainly led him to believe that, despite continually growing security obligations overseas, the United States could reasonably risk leveling off and even cutting investment in its defense establishment—a perspective not shared by Forrestal. Not until the appearance of NSC 68 nearly a year and a half later would the Truman administration again address the problems of trying to bring foreign and defense policy into closer harmony. But the impetus then would come not from Defense but from the Department of State, and would be tied to a different and potentially more dangerous international environment.

While the immediate consequences may have been negligible, one lasting effect of NSC 20/4 and the events surrounding its development was a much clearer picture of the Secretary's future role in the overall policy process and in foreign affairs particularly.

## **Conclusion**

Forrestal took seriously his designation under the National Security Act as the President's principal national security assistant and tried to operate accordingly. He viewed himself not merely as another executive department head, but as a coordinator with government-wide interests and responsibilities. He assumed office in 1947 fully expecting foreign affairs to be a significant part of his agenda, in line with what he considered his statutory responsibilities under the National Security Act. As historian Melvyn Leffler cogently summarizes, "Forrestal never ceased insisting on the importance of integrating defense and foreign policy, of matching military capabilities with diplomatic commitments, and of reconciling the costs of defense with the needs of the domestic economy."<sup>55</sup>

As the first Secretary of Defense, Forrestal established procedures that are still relevant to this day. One of the most lasting requirements, one that reflected his belief in the need for a joint strategy, was the necessity of establishing an integrated national

security policy that reflected both foreign and defense policy. Associated with this view, he recognized the need for allies within the government, in particular the Secretary of State, to push the views of the Department of Defense. And he came to recognize that he had not made the Secretary's staff large enough to conduct the business of the department. Forrestal also realized that his perspective of his role as senior national security assistant to the President in the National Security Council might at times be at odds with the role of the Secretary of Defense as envisioned by the President. This divergence had the potential to create friction and possible disconnects in foreign and defense policy formation—something Forrestal himself discovered right away.

By the time the preparation of NSC 20/4 was over, it was apparent that Truman had become exasperated with a Secretary of Defense who aspired to turn the NSC into “an operating super-cabinet on the British model.”<sup>56</sup> Henceforth, although the Secretary's participation in NSC affairs would remain an important part of his job, it would never be the focal point that Forrestal had envisioned. Above all, it was the President who determined and continues to determine the Secretary of Defense's role and degree of involvement in foreign affairs. Forrestal served under a President who viewed the Secretary's job from a considerably narrower perspective. Rating efficient management as his number-one priority, Truman wanted the Secretary of Defense to take charge of the military budget, eliminate waste and unnecessary duplication, and give the taxpayer a better return on investment. Although not averse to the Secretary's participation in foreign policy, Truman considered this a secondary function of the job.

Yet in the face of worsening relations with the Soviet Union and the increased possibility of U.S. military intervention in a number of foreign trouble spots, Truman acknowledged that as a practical matter, Cold War problems overshadowed all others in initially framing the Secretary of Defense's foreign affairs agenda. The development of effective working relations between the Pentagon



and the White House for managing these new situations did not come easily. Although he respected Forrestal's ability, Truman was openly at odds with him over such key issues as the running of the NSC, military spending, custody and control of atomic energy, and policy toward Palestine and China. The more they disagreed, the more apparent it became that Forrestal's departure was probably only a matter of time. That point came in March 1949 with Forrestal's resignation. His successor, Louis Johnson, was of an entirely different temperament and readily adapted to the more circumscribed description of his duties under the 1949 amendments as "principal assistant to the President in all matters relating to the Department of Defense."<sup>57</sup>



## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Walter Millis with E.S. Duffield, eds., *The Forrestal Diaries* (New York: Viking, 1951), 299.

<sup>2</sup> The most recent monograph on the Secretaries of Defense, albeit one that devotes only a few pages to Forrestal, is Charles A. Stevenson, *SecDef: The Nearly Impossible Job of Secretary of Defense* (Washington, DC: Potomac Books, 2006), 9–10; for a more comprehensive account, see Steven L. Rearden, *History of the Office of the Secretary of Defense, vol. I, The Formative Years, 1947–1950* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office [GPO], 1984), 29–43.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in Henry F. Pringle, *Theodore Roosevelt: A Biography* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1931), 172.

<sup>4</sup> Edward S. Miller, *War Plan Orange: The U.S. Strategy to Defeat Japan* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1991). Also see J.A.S. Grenville, “Diplomacy and War Plans in the United States, 1890–1917,” in Lawrence E. Gelfand, *Essays on the History of American Foreign Relations* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1972).

<sup>5</sup> Quoted in Ernest R. May, “The Development of Political-Military Consultation in the United States,” *Political Science Quarterly* 70 (June 1955), 166.

<sup>6</sup> See Thomas J. Knock, *To End All Wars: Woodrow Wilson and the Quest for a New World Order* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

<sup>7</sup> William L. Langer and S. Everett Gleason, *The Challenge of Isolation: The World Crisis of 1937–1940 and American Foreign Policy* (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1970), 40–41; Mark Skinner Watson, *Chief of Staff: Prewar Plans and Preparations* (Washington, DC: Historical Division, Department of the Army, 1950), 93–94.

<sup>8</sup> James F. Schnabel, *History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff: The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy, 1945–1947* (Washington, DC: Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 1996), 1–2.

<sup>9</sup> See Thomas Patterson and Dennis Merrill, eds., *Major Problems in American Foreign Relations*, vol. 2 (Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath and Co., 1995), 185–233.

<sup>10</sup> See, for example, Herbert Feis, *The China Tangle: The American Effort in China from Pearl Harbor to the Marshall Mission* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953).

<sup>11</sup> Ray Cline, *Washington Command Post: The Operations Division* (Washington, DC: Chief of Military History, 1951), 322–327.

<sup>12</sup> Paul Y. Hammond, “Directives for the Occupation of Germany: The Washington Controversy,” in *American Civil-Military Decisions*, ed. Harold Stein (Birmingham: University of Alabama Press, 1963), 311–464; Steven L. Rearden, “American Policy Toward Germany, 1944–1946,” Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1975, chaps. 1–2.

<sup>13</sup> Rearden, *Formative Years*, 11–16; also see Kenneth W. Condit, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy, 1947–1949* (Washington, DC: Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 1996), 1–9.

<sup>14</sup> Roger Trask and Albert Goldberg, *The Department of Defense: Organization and Leaders* (Washington, DC: Historical Office, Office of the Secretary of Defense, 1997), 1–14.

<sup>15</sup> For quote, see James Forrestal, testimony before the Senate Committee on Military Affairs, October 22, 1945, in *Hearings: Department of Armed Forces, Department of Military Security*, 79:1 (Washington, DC: GPO, 1945), 97. The most balanced biography of Forrestal remains Townsend Hoopes and Douglas Brinkley, *Driven Patriot: The Life and Times of James Forrestal* (New York: Knopf, 1992); far less reliable but interesting nonetheless for its psycho-historical methodology is Arnold A. Rogow, *James Forrestal: A Study of Personality, Politics, and Policy* (New York: Macmillan, 1963).

<sup>16</sup> For the origins of the report see Jeffrey M. Dorwart, *Eberstadt and Forrestal: A National Security Partnership, 1909–1949* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1991), 98.

<sup>17</sup> Alfred D. Sander, “Truman and the National Security Council: 1945–1947,” *Journal of American History* 59 (September 1972), 369–388.

<sup>18</sup> See memo, Marshall to Truman, February 7, 1947, “Comments . . . on Draft Bill to Promote National Security,” in *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS) 1947*, I (Washington, DC: GPO, 1967), 712–715. It should be noted that, as Army Chief of Staff in 1944–1945, Marshall had been the principal architect of the War Department’s unification proposal, and therefore had a personal interest in promoting its adoption over the Navy’s plan. For perhaps the most definitive account of national

security policy formulation in the Truman years, see Melvyn Leffler, *A Preponderance of Power: National Security, the Truman Administration, and the Cold War* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992).

<sup>19</sup> For a nuanced account of the machinations behind the National Security Act and the National Military Establishment, see Cecilia Stiles Cornell, "James V. Forrestal and American National Security Policy, 1940–1949," Ph.D. dissertation, Vanderbilt University, 1987, 228–308.

<sup>20</sup> Clark Clifford with Richard Holbrooke, *Counsel to the President* (New York: Random House, 1991), 162–163.

<sup>21</sup> Anna Kasten Nelson, "President Truman and the Evolution of the National Security Council," *Journal of American History* 72 (September 1985), 360–378; Sander, 385–387; Rearden, *Formative Years*, 118–123. For Souers's personal perspective on the role of the NSC, see Sidney Souers, "The National Security Council under President Truman," in *The National Security Council: Jackson Subcommittee on Policy-Making at the Presidential Level*, ed. Henry Jackson (New York: Praeger, 1965), 99–110.

<sup>22</sup> Millis, 316.

<sup>23</sup> Trask and Goldberg, 136.

<sup>24</sup> Hoopes and Brinkley, 355.

<sup>25</sup> See, generally, Leffler, 141–181.

<sup>26</sup> Cornell, 252–260.

<sup>27</sup> For a more detailed discussion of this point, see Ernest R. May, *Lessons of the Past: The Uses and Misuses of History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973). See also Leffler, 1–24.

<sup>28</sup> Randall B. Woods and Howard Jones, *Dawning of the Cold War: The United States' Quest for Order* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1991), 133–173.

<sup>29</sup> See, for example, Lloyd C. Gardner, *Architects of Illusion: Men and Ideas in American Foreign Policy, 1941–1949* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1970), 270–300.

<sup>30</sup> "Secretary's Executive Session with the President's Air Policy Commission," November 3, 1947, Office of the Secretary of Defense Historical Office files.

<sup>31</sup> Rearden, *Formative Years*, 58–67.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>33</sup> The National Security Act of 1947 created a War Council to advise the Secretary of Defense on “matters of broad policy relating to the armed forces.” The Council consisted of the Service secretaries and the Joint Chiefs of Staff, with powers of decision reserved to the Secretary of Defense. In 1949, when Public Law 216 amended the 1947 Act, it was renamed the Armed Forces Policy Council, with the Deputy Secretary of Defense and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff added; the Commandant of the Marine Corps joined it in 1983.

<sup>34</sup> Millis, 286.

<sup>35</sup> Doris Condit, *History of the Office of the Secretary of Defense: The Test of War, 1950–1953* (Washington, DC: Historical Office, Office of the Secretary of Defense, 1988), 34.

<sup>36</sup> Hoopes and Brinkley, 387–404.

<sup>37</sup> Memo, Joint Chiefs of Staff for Truman, April 4, 1948, “Provision of U.S. Armed Forces in Palestine,” in *FRUS 1948*, V, 798–800.

<sup>38</sup> See, for example, Central Intelligence Agency, “Review of the World Situation,” September 26, 1947, and “Review of the World Situation,” November 14, 1947, box 203, PSF, Intelligence File, Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

<sup>39</sup> Memo, Roscoe H. Hillenkoetter for the President, March 16, 1948, RG 330, CD 12–1–26.

<sup>40</sup> For more on the Finletter Commission, see Robert Frank Futrell, *Ideas, Concepts, Doctrine: Basic Thinking in the United States Air Force, 1907–1960*, vol. 1 (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air University Press, December 1989), 224–231.

<sup>41</sup> Trask and Goldberg, 58.

<sup>42</sup> Memo, Forrestal for Executive Secretary, National Security Council (NSC), March 12, 1948, “International Situation,” RG 330, CD 9–2–18.

<sup>43</sup> NSC 7, “Soviet-directed World Communism,” March 30, 1948, *FRUS 1948*, I, 545–550.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 557–564.

<sup>45</sup> Memo, Marx Leva for John H. Ohly, May 26, 1948, “Committee of Four Meeting, May 26, 1948,” RG 330, CD 9–2–30.

<sup>46</sup> See "X" (George F. Kennan), "The Sources of Soviet Conduct," *Foreign Affairs* 25 (July 1947), 566–582. This article was based on Kennan's famous "long telegram" on Soviet behavior that he sent while serving as chargé in the U.S. Embassy in Moscow, February 22, 1946; available at <[www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/coldwar/documents/episode-1/kennan.htm](http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/coldwar/documents/episode-1/kennan.htm)>. For Forrestal's influence, see, Rearden, 7–8.

<sup>47</sup> Memo, Kennan for Lovett, August 5, 1948, "Basic Policy Estimate," *FRUS 1948*, I, 599–601.

<sup>48</sup> Memo summarizing discussion at a conference called by the President, May 21, 1948, Truman Papers, President's Secretary's File, National Security Council Collection.

<sup>49</sup> Memo, Forrestal for Executive Secretary, NSC, July 10, 1948, "Appraisal of the Degree and Character of Military Preparedness Required by the World Situation," RG 330, CD 5–1–50.

<sup>50</sup> Letter, Truman to Forrestal, July 15, 1948, RG 330, CD 5–1–50.

<sup>51</sup> For the wrangling over the fiscal year 1950 defense budget, see Warner R. Schilling, "The Politics of National Defense: Fiscal 1950," in Warner R. Schilling, Paul Y. Hammond, and Glenn H. Snyder, *Strategy, Politics, and Defense Budgets* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962), 1–266

<sup>52</sup> Letter, Forrestal to Truman, December 1, 1948, *FRUS 1948*, I, 669–672.

<sup>53</sup> NSC 20/4, "U.S. Objectives with Respect to Counter Soviet Threats to U.S. Security," November 23, 1948, in *FRUS 1948*, I, 663–669.

<sup>54</sup> NSC 20/4, November 23, 1948, "U.S. Objectives with Respect to the USSR to Counter Soviet Threats to U.S. Security," *FRUS 1948*, I, 662–669.

<sup>55</sup> Leffler, 176.

<sup>56</sup> Harry S. Truman, *Memoirs: Years of Trial and Hope* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1956), 60.

<sup>57</sup> For a brief description and analysis of the 1949 amendments, see Trask and Goldberg, 14–21.





## **About the Authors**

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**Historical Office  
Office of the Secretary of Defense  
Washington, DC**

**Published by National Defense University Press**

