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# REARMING AT THE DAWN OF THE COLD WAR

LOUIS JOHNSON, GEORGE MARSHALL,  
AND ROBERT LOVETT  
1949-1952



COLD WAR FOREIGN POLICY SERIES

SPECIAL STUDY 2

**Jeffrey A. Larsen and Robert M. Shelala II**

Historical Office  
Office of the Secretary of Defense

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*Cover Photos:* Louis Johnson is sworn in as Secretary of Defense, March 28, 1949; President Harry Truman meets in the Oval Office with Secretary of Defense George Marshall and Deputy Secretary of Defense Robert Lovett, 1951.

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## Foreword

This is the second special study in a series by the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) Historical Office that emphasizes the Secretary's role in the U.S. foreign policy making process and how the position evolved between 1947 and the early 1990s. The study presented here examines the last 4 years of the Harry S. Truman administration and a succession of Secretaries of Defense who served during the Korean War: Louis Johnson, George Marshall, and Robert Lovett. These three Secretaries took divergent approaches to meeting their mandate from President Truman in an era of increasing foreign policy and national security challenges. The study is not 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 and the person 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 U.S. 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.

Concern with foreign affairs goes to the very essence of defense and military policy. That foreign policy consumes a large portion of the Secretary of Defense's time is not surprising. 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 years of the Department of Defense, it has certainly become an omnipresent factor.

This series of special studies by the Historical Office is part of an ongoing effort to highlight various aspects of the Secretary's mission and achievements. This is the second study in a nine-part series on the role of the Secretary of Defense in U.S. foreign policy making during the Cold War. This series began as a book manuscript 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 serializing Dr. Rearden's previously unpublished manuscript. I also wish to thank Dr. Alfred Goldberg, former OSD Chief Historian, and Dr. Lawrence Kaplan for their critique and helpful suggestions. Thanks also to OSD Graphics, especially Kathleen Jones, for designing the cover and formatting the special studies series, and to the editorial team at National Defense University Press, particularly Lisa M. Yambrick, for their support.

We anticipate that future study series will cover a variety of defense topics. We invite you to peruse our other publications at <http://history.defense.gov/>.

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

## Executive Summary

As the first U.S. Secretary of Defense, James Forrestal did not have the opportunity to lead the Pentagon under the expanded powers of the National Security Act as amended in 1949. His successor, Louis Johnson, committed much time and effort to advance President Harry S. Truman's goals of integrating the National Military Establishment into a single, cohesive executive entity, as well as of economizing national security. Benefiting from the National Security Act amendments, Johnson enlarged the Office of the Secretary of Defense, cut personnel in the Armed Forces, stopped the Navy flush-deck supercarrier procurement effort, and favored strategic nuclear forces over more costly conventional forces.

At the same time Johnson sought to establish the power of the Secretary of Defense, he also was driving a wedge between the Defense and State Departments as tensions grew between himself and Secretary of State Dean Acheson over the crafting of foreign policy. To gain an edge over Acheson, Johnson attempted to influence policy in the National Security Council and limited Defense-State communications. While not an enthusiast of the treaty that created it, Johnson would play an important role in orchestrating the establishment of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, providing member states with the logistical and material support necessary to create a strong alliance.

The 1949 Soviet nuclear weapons test and the Communist revolution in China triggered a recalibration in the U.S. threat perception of the Soviet Union and China. These events would push two issues to the top of the national security agenda for the Truman administration: the development of the hydrogen bomb, and the reevaluation of U.S. grand strategy. Johnson became a

strong advocate of the hydrogen bomb, a weapon that would help ensure a qualitative edge over the Soviet nuclear arsenal. The Defense Department's isolation from the State Department and Johnson's own reluctance to participate in joint policy planning led to the State Department taking the lead in shaping the grand strategy published in the report known as National Security Council 68 (NSC 68).

The requirements for containment delineated in NSC 68, coupled with the demand for an American response to the invasion of South Korea, served as the catalyst for a shift from economy to rearmament. This shift, along with the sharp antagonism between Johnson and Acheson, eventually brought an end to Johnson's tenure as the second Secretary of Defense.

In September 1950, in the midst of the Korean War, President Truman selected former Secretary of State George Marshall to succeed Johnson. An experienced diplomat and military administrator, Marshall quickly created good relations with the State Department in general and with Acheson in particular. Defense spending began to increase substantially in response to the demands of the war and the requirements of deterring the Soviet Union under NSC 68. Marshall's Deputy Secretary of Defense, Robert Lovett, succeeded him as Secretary in September 1951. Marshall appears to have reached an understanding with Truman that Lovett would take over as Secretary of Defense after a year, and the seamless handoff of responsibilities in 1951 was planned from the onset of Marshall's tenure. The tenures of the two Secretaries can be considered as essentially one continuous term of office, given their similar views and perspectives on budgeting, security issues, and the role of the Secretary of Defense.

While Johnson had sought aggressively to rival the influence of the Secretary of State on foreign policy, Marshall and Lovett succeeded

in making the Secretary of Defense a key actor in foreign policy making while fostering a positive relationship with the State Department. The more amicable environment between Defense and State as well as the greater salience of security issues in foreign policy set the stage for the empowerment of the Secretary of Defense in the policy realm that Forrestal had sought and Johnson had fought to obtain. However, the challenges of safeguarding the defense budget and handling the administration of such a vast organization complicated the role of the Secretary of Defense, as did the requirement of pursuing a budget that balanced fiscal prudence with meeting national security demands. Johnson's tenure would serve as a caution that tilting too far toward the lower end of the budgetary spectrum could be detrimental to national security. Marshall and Lovett learned that lesson and strengthened the Office of the Secretary of Defense in the process.

The efforts made by James Forrestal as the first Secretary of Defense to guide national security policy proved impossible without the consent of the President—consent that was not forthcoming. No Secretary of Defense would ever be in a position to challenge the President’s authority; no President could permit it. Forrestal became painfully aware of this during his confrontation with President Harry S. Truman over the fiscal year (FY) 1950 military budget. With his influence thus diminished and with increasing signs that he was on the verge of a nervous breakdown, Forrestal’s remaining tenure as Secretary appeared likely to be short. Any lingering doubt was removed when, in March 1949, President Truman announced that he was appointing Louis A. Johnson, his 1948 campaign fundraiser, as the new Secretary of Defense. For Forrestal, who had come to devote himself wholeheartedly to public service, it was an ignominious yet unavoidable exit.<sup>1</sup>

### **Louis Johnson in Command**

Johnson took up his duties at the Pentagon in late March 1949 with a clear mandate from Truman to enforce discipline in the Services, exercise strict economy, and make Service unification more of a day-to-day working reality than it had been under Forrestal. Savvy, hard-driving, and ambitious, Johnson had been a highly successful attorney in private life. Prior to World War II, he had spent several years (1937–1940) in President Franklin Roosevelt’s administration as Assistant Secretary of War, locked in controversy much of the time with his immediate superior, Secretary of War Harry H. Woodring. Johnson’s appointment as Secretary of Defense suggested a payoff for helping to secure Truman’s election the previous November. But it was also obvious that after Forrestal, Truman wanted a “doer,” not a “thinker,” heading the Pentagon. Johnson seemed like just the person.



Ironically, the qualities that Truman initially valued in Johnson—his determination, no-nonsense attitude toward Service sensitivities, and zealous pursuit of economies and budget-cutting—would eventually prove to be serious liabilities. So, too, would Johnson's lack of knowledge and experience in foreign affairs, which increasingly required his attention. In sharp contrast to Forrestal, Johnson placed foreign policy matters low on his list of priorities, only to discover that his presence and advice as Secretary of Defense were often in demand, not only in Washington, but in London, Paris, and elsewhere overseas as well. Indeed, as the United States became more deeply involved in the Cold War through the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the Mutual Defense Assistance Program (MDAP), and other American initiatives with military implications, his responsibilities as Secretary of Defense acquired truly global proportions, though not always in ways that Johnson found comfortable or consonant with policies he was trying to pursue.<sup>2</sup>

Johnson's arrival at the Pentagon occurred at roughly the same time that Congress was holding final hearings on amendments to the 1947 National Security Act. These amendments, originally proposed by Forrestal, became law in August 1949 and replaced the National Military Establishment created by the original act with a Department of Defense that functioned as a full-fledged executive department in which the Secretary of Defense possessed clearer direction, authority, and control. At the same time, however, the new law stripped the Secretary of his title as "principal assistant to the President in all matters relating to the national security." Truman had never liked this provision, feeling that it gave the Secretary of Defense too much latitude and license to intervene in the affairs of other agencies and departments.<sup>3</sup> When Congress undertook to amend the law, Truman made sure that this provision was dropped for a somewhat narrower—but more accurate—description of the Secretary's function as the President's principal assistant "in all matters relating to the Department of Defense." This change, while intended as a departure from the ideas Forrestal

had espoused, actually made little difference in the policy process since the Secretary continued to serve on the National Security Council (NSC). Congress dropped the Service Secretaries from NSC membership, thus implicitly reaffirming the Secretary of Defense's paramount advisory role, and it added the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) as statutory advisors to the council, thereby assuring the uniformed heads of the Services access to and inclusion in high-level decisionmaking.<sup>4</sup>



*President Truman signs the Amendment to the National Security Act of 1947 as Secretary of Defense Johnson (to Truman's left) and other Cabinet members look on, August 10, 1949.*

*(Abbie Rowe/Truman Presidential Library, used with permission)*

Even before the 1949 amendments became law, Johnson was well on his way toward consolidating authority over the Pentagon. Through flawed judgment or exaggerated expectations, he brought many of the difficulties and much of the resistance he eventually encountered on himself. But other problems—intense inter-Service competition for funds, debate over rival weapons systems, and resistance to unification by the military Services, especially the Navy—he inherited from Forrestal. His tough leadership style on budget issues reflected to a considerable degree his determination to maintain order. Meanwhile, Truman was more determined than ever to hold down military expenditures. Fearing a business recession in the spring of 1949 that would eat into Federal revenues and leave the government in the red, the President lowered the ceiling on the military budget for FY51 from \$15 billion to \$13 billion. Johnson, eager to do his part, launched a relentless—

some thought ruthless and excessive—economy drive to meet the President’s target. Indicating that strategic airpower and nuclear weapons would now bear the major burden of the country’s defense, Johnson set off a firestorm by canceling the Navy’s much-prized new flush-deck supercarriers. As a further moneysaving move, he reduced Active-duty military personnel strength by 100,000.<sup>5</sup>

No less controversial than Johnson’s budget cuts were his stormy relationship with Secretary of State Dean Acheson, George Marshall’s successor, and the unprecedented prohibitions Johnson imposed on exchanges between the State and Defense Departments. Johnson tried to draw a distinction between military policy, which he saw as the province of the Defense Department, and political affairs, which he left to State. Such distinctions had become increasingly artificial and outdated, but they were useful to Johnson nonetheless as a means of protecting his turf and reinforcing his authority. Breaking with Forrestal’s practice, Johnson no longer invited such senior State Department specialists as George Kennan and Charles Bohlen to the Pentagon to give background briefings.<sup>6</sup> Instead, wherever possible, Johnson sought to narrow State-Defense contacts and, as a matter of policy, required all Defense Department officials to conduct any business they might have with State through his immediate office.<sup>7</sup> He also insisted that all members of his staff, the Service Secretaries, and the Joint Chiefs furnish him with copies of “every communication” they sent to or received from the State Department.<sup>8</sup> Efforts by Acheson to persuade Johnson to loosen his restrictions on contacts proved unsuccessful and helped fuel press speculation of an Acheson-Johnson feud. So frustrated did Acheson eventually become that he suspected that there was something emotionally wrong with Johnson and that he must have been “mentally ill.” “His conduct,” Acheson claimed in his memoirs, “became too outrageous to be explained by mere cussedness. It did not surprise me when some years later he underwent a brain operation.”<sup>9</sup>

Though heavily criticized by Acheson and others, Johnson’s approach to political-military affairs did not differ much in substance from Forrestal’s. Concentrating responsibility around the Secretary of Defense, from Johnson’s standpoint, represented a logical mechanism for coping with the burgeoning volume of work and at the same time protecting the integrity of his own position within the policymaking system. Like Forrestal, Johnson regarded the NSC as the focal point of policymaking and sought to conduct business accordingly. Acheson, on the other hand, found the NSC a cumbersome impediment and at times an unwelcome barrier between him and the President. He preferred a less formal, more fluid environment and liked whenever possible to conduct business with Truman in private one-on-one meetings. He also insisted that he should have direct, unchecked access to the Joint Chiefs, something Johnson viewed as not only an unwarranted intrusion into his domain but also a blatant attempt by Acheson to lay claim to the entire national security apparatus.<sup>10</sup>

Paradoxically, despite the contentious environment, this period was also one of the more creative and productive in American foreign and defense policy. Between the beginning of Truman’s term in January 1949 and the outbreak of the Korean War a year and a half later, the United States effectively completed the transition, begun with the Truman Doctrine, the Marshall Plan, and NATO, from hesitant opponent of Soviet expansion to active interventionist in the Cold War arena. By no means an easy process, this affirmation confirmed, for better or worse, that military power—particularly strategic airpower, atomic weapons, and the eventual development of hydrogen weapons—was a growing and integral part of U.S. Cold War foreign policy.<sup>11</sup> It set in motion the development of a peacetime defense establishment specifically designed to fulfill that role, a defense establishment far larger in size and different in character from any the United States had previously known in peacetime.

## NATO and the Military Assistance Program

Nowhere was the interaction between defense and foreign affairs more plainly visible than in the growth of U.S. defense commitments abroad, starting with the signing of the North Atlantic Treaty in April 1949. The treaty's central purpose was to provide collective security against the potential danger of a Soviet invasion of Western Europe, but its practical application extended well beyond promises of mutual support in the event of trouble. Marking the end of an American tradition of not joining "entangling alliances," the treaty set in motion a chain of events that, over time, recast the entire range of political, military, economic, and even cultural relations between the United States and Western Europe. Henceforth, as long as the Soviet threat persisted, Western Europe and the United States would share a common destiny.<sup>12</sup>

Despite the treaty's momentous implications, Johnson remained skeptical that the United States would, or should, become overly involved in European affairs. In 1948, while addressing the Daughters of the American Revolution, he dismissed foreign alliances as "not in the tradition of the United States."<sup>13</sup> Although he quickly disavowed these sentiments after becoming Secretary of Defense, he was forever concerned that the Alliance would prove to be a drain on limited American resources. He inclined, therefore, to hedge American participation in Western Europe's defense, limiting it to a minimal contribution. For budgetary and strategic reasons, he considered a direct commitment of American combat forces out of the question and never envisioned the involvement of U.S. military assets other than naval forces to secure the sealanes and strategic air already earmarked for bombardment of the Soviet Union.<sup>14</sup>

Johnson's uneasiness over NATO also grew out of other concerns—one of which was its close identification with Acheson. During the final negotiations leading up to the creation of the Alliance, it was Acheson who was in the forefront of the discussions of the treaty's

terms; it was Acheson who repeatedly over the ensuing months handled the delicate diplomacy of forging the Alliance's original 12 disparate members into a working coalition. Johnson's role in all this was, appropriately, secondary to Acheson's. As a member of the North Atlantic Defense Committee, comprised of the NATO defense ministers who met at regular intervals, the Secretary of Defense was ostensibly a key figure in shaping high-level strategy and policy. Johnson's actual participation in NATO decisions, however, wound up being confined for the most part to arranging coordination between the various NATO planning bodies and the U.S. Joint Chiefs and to providing advice as needed on such matters as supply and logistics, MDAP allocations, finance, and other related issues—all important subjects, to be sure, but not ones that captured newspaper headlines or enhanced Johnson's public stature.<sup>15</sup>

Johnson found a further source of irritation in the MDAP, a worldwide military assistance effort in which help to NATO accounted for two-thirds of the funds initially budgeted. Even though MDAP was a separate program supported by its own appropriations, Johnson considered it a competitor of the Pentagon's own budget requests. Money allocated for military assistance meant less funds available to the Defense Department at a time when Johnson was doing everything he could to save and stretch dollars. All the same, the decisions having been made well before he took office, Johnson accepted MDAP as a *fait accompli* and adjusted accordingly.<sup>16</sup>

NATO and MDAP were unavoidable responsibilities, both for Johnson personally and for members of his staff. While the State Department exercised overall policy responsibility for MDAP, the day-to-day management and administration rested with the Pentagon. To deal with these and related matters, in August 1949, Johnson recalled from retirement his former War Department aide, Major General James H. Burns, USA (Ret.),<sup>17</sup> to serve as his special consultant on political-military affairs, taking over the embryonic

international security organization that Special Assistant John H. Ohly had started in 1947.<sup>18</sup> Affable, open-minded, and widely respected, Burns was an ideal counterweight to his hard-charging, opinionated boss. Because of frail health, however, Burns rarely spent more than half-days at his desk and relied heavily on two principal assistants—Major General Lyman L. Lemnitzer, USA, who served as coordinator for military aid, and Najeeb E. Halaby, who handled the remainder of foreign military affairs.<sup>19</sup>

The increased tempo of activity occasioned by the advent of NATO and MDAP made it exceedingly difficult for responsible officials like Lemnitzer and Halaby to abide by Johnson's restrictions on contacts with the Department of State. Much of the time, as a matter of expediency, they had no choice but to ignore Johnson's prohibitions and risk the consequences.<sup>20</sup> From all accounts, Johnson could be rude and unfeeling toward subordinates, but he was never known to be so vindictive as to relieve someone of his job without good reason. Johnson had the perspicacity to realize—despite whatever reservations Acheson may have had about his mental state—that his true concerns had little to do with the behavior of the Pentagon bureaucracy. Rather, what he considered to be Acheson's meddling in defense policy was what bothered him most of all. From the fall of 1949 on, this constituted an almost constant source of friction in State-Defense relations.

### **New Threats: The Soviet Atomic Test and China's Communist Revolution**

Two international events in 1949 intensified the perceived threat posed by communism to U.S. security interests. First came the discovery in early September 1949 that the Soviet Union had recently detonated an atomic device, thus ending the American nuclear monopoly at least a year sooner than was expected. U.S. intelligence later pinpointed the test as having taken place on August 29, 1949, and estimated its yield as similar to the American bomb dropped on Nagasaki (about 20 kilotons). Although the

United States appeared in no immediate danger, it seemed only a matter of time—possibly as early as mid-1953—before the Soviet Union would have enough bombs and long-range planes to threaten serious damage.<sup>21</sup> From that point on, should war break out, the continental United States could find itself thrust onto the front line of combat.

The other trauma came from the virtual disintegration of all remaining resistance by the Chinese Nationalists and the proclamation on October 1, 1949, of the People's Republic of China (PRC) headed by Mao Zedong. While not unexpected, the Nationalists' defeat was so swift and thorough as to suggest the imminent possibility of a "red tide" sweeping across the Far East. More than a diplomatic setback, the Communist victory persuaded many Americans, especially those who made up the right wing of the Republican Party, that U.S. policy in Asia had been inherently flawed, perhaps even sabotaged, and that the "loss" of China might somehow have been avoidable.<sup>22</sup>

Not surprisingly, the Soviet atomic test and the fall of China were bound to produce major policy repercussions. Indeed, even though the American public, by and large, took these events in stride, they sent a shock wave through Washington unlike any felt since the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. The consensus saw them as the most ominous intensification to date of the ongoing Cold War, possibly even a prelude to global war or, no less unsettling, a possible shift in the global balance of power in favor of the Soviet Union. Dissenters from this view were few and far between and did not receive much of a hearing.<sup>23</sup>

The closed-door debates that followed represented some of the most intense in American history. Though in agreement on the gravity of the situation, Acheson and Johnson differed considerably on how to address it. Since the United States could do nothing to stop the Soviet Union from further development of nuclear weapons, short of an exceedingly risky preemptive strike against



the Soviet atomic energy complex in Central Asia, something else would have to be done to offset the impact of its atomic bomb capability. The course that received the most attention called for forging ahead with U.S. development of a much stronger weapon, a thermonuclear or hydrogen bomb (H-bomb). With the U.S. defense posture tilting increasingly toward strategic airpower and nuclear weapons, Johnson, supported by the Joint Chiefs and key congressional figures, unhesitatingly endorsed the H-bomb as a necessary addition to the U.S. arsenal. Not only would it reassert America's lead in the atomic energy field and reassure U.S. allies, advocates of the hydrogen bomb argued, but it also seemed like the logical step to take in view of the possibility that the Soviet Union might have initiated work on a hydrogen bomb of its own. Opponents, led by the chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission, David E. Lilienthal, countered that the hydrogen bomb, because of its extraordinary potential power, was morally reprehensible, would only further fuel an East-West nuclear arms race, and would contribute little to American security. President Truman, seeing logic on both sides, delayed an immediate decision by turning the matter over in November 1949 to a special committee of the NSC comprised of Johnson, Acheson, and Lilienthal. Given the strong, prevailing differences of opinion, an early recommendation seemed unlikely.<sup>24</sup>

With the H-bomb question relegated to further study, attention turned to the deteriorating situation in the Far East. Again, as with the Soviet atomic bomb, American options were limited. Anticipating the worst, Acheson had sought to cushion the blow by releasing a detailed official history arguing that the United States had done all it could over the past few years to avert a Communist takeover. The China White Paper published in the summer of 1949, however, failed to assuage critics, Johnson among them. Like Forrestal, Johnson tended to favor more vigorous American actions in China, if not to prop up the faltering Nationalists, then at least to preserve some semblance of U.S. influence through support of non-Communist, pro-Western pockets of resistance. But the

sudden and total nature of the Communist victory took nearly everyone, including Johnson, by surprise and effectively preempted any last-ditch efforts to salvage the remnants of Chiang Kai-shek's beleaguered regime on the mainland. The survivors, led by Chiang himself, fled by the thousands to Taiwan (Formosa), where they dug in for what loomed as the final battle.<sup>25</sup>

Despite the Nationalists' desperate situation, Johnson continued to talk as if a rescue operation might yet be possible. Such optimism on Johnson's part amounted to little more than political posturing, but it readily appealed to Chiang's supporters in the United States and helped to boost the Secretary's credibility and popularity with the China bloc in Congress at a time when Acheson and the State Department looked increasingly embarrassed and ineffectual. Earlier, in June 1949, Johnson had also asked the NSC to conduct a complete review of U.S. policy in Asia. However, the State Department's Far East experts, suspecting hidden motives, resented Johnson's intrusion and stalled as long as they could. When a draft report (NSC 48/1) was finally ready for discussion in December, the Nationalists' prospects looked bleaker than ever.<sup>26</sup>

Johnson had no illusions that it might yet be possible to save Chiang and his followers from disaster without large-scale U.S. military intervention. He did, however, hope to convince Truman that in light of the strong criticism of U.S. policy, it would be ill advised for the United States to be seen abandoning a former close ally. Johnson wanted to use some of the money appropriated for MDAP—specifically, part of a \$75-million slush fund set aside by Congress for aid to “the general area of China”—as a gesture of American support and continuing concern. As it turned out, it was a futile endeavor. Heeding Acheson's advice instead, Truman feared that even the limited aid Johnson proposed would lead to unforeseen complications and drag the United States into the fray. “The President did not disagree with the military considerations,” Johnson recalled. “I was told, without quoting him directly, that

he wasn't going to argue with me about the military considerations but that on political grounds he would decide with the State Department."<sup>27</sup>

The policy adopted in NSC 48/2 over Johnson's objections had two main goals: to extricate the United States from the messy situation brought on by the Chinese civil war, and to prepare the way for the eventual normalization of relations between the United States and the PRC. Acheson elaborated to a National Press Club audience in January 1950 that American security interests in the Far East would henceforth follow a line running south from the Aleutians, through Japan and the Ryukyu Islands, to the Philippines. This placement of Taiwan and Korea—both known trouble spots—outside the sphere of U.S. responsibility would later come back to haunt Acheson as having invited the North Korean aggression of June 1950. Yet at the time, the omission of Taiwan and Korea seemed less an act of negligence or oversight than a reflection of official American thinking on the insoluble nature of East Asia's problems. Johnson, though he may have privately disagreed with Acheson's statement, had no reason to go public with dissent. If, despite the American hands-off policy, Taiwan managed to survive, so much the better; if not, the opprobrium would be Acheson's to bear.<sup>28</sup>

In the long run, however, whatever happened to Taiwan was not nearly as likely to affect American security as how the United States handled the H-bomb question. Having extended its deliberations over several months, the NSC special committee neared a recommendation in January 1950. Although Lilienthal remained apprehensive about the H-bomb, he warmed to a suggestion from Acheson that would link a decision on stepping up research to a special in-depth review of U.S. foreign and defense policy. This last proviso struck Johnson as extraneous, since the NSC staff had already scheduled a comprehensive policy roundup.<sup>29</sup> Yet it was the price he realized he would have to pay if he wanted a unanimous recommendation favoring development of the hydrogen bomb. On January 31, 1950, the special committee met briefly with Truman,

who quickly approved both the hydrogen bomb and the proposed special study, a two-part decision that would move the United States inexorably closer to military containment of the Soviet Union.<sup>30</sup>

## NSC 68

The fragile consensus between Johnson and Acheson that had paved the way for the hydrogen bomb decision dissipated quickly. Although Johnson agreed to the special State-Defense study, he did so reluctantly and treated it from the beginning as an unwarranted imposition on his time and an encroachment on his terrain. With the H-bomb project finally under way, and with the U.S. strategic nuclear air arm growing stronger, Johnson saw no reason to press the inquiry into such areas as the adequacy or soundness of America's defense posture. Remaining personally aloof from the whole project, he looked to Burns and the Joint Chiefs to handle the details and to arrange coordination with State through an ad hoc review group. But he did not encourage them to be forthcoming with sensitive information.<sup>31</sup> While the ultimate purpose of the study remained unclear at this stage, Johnson felt almost certain that it would have no significant impact on defense or national security policy. He believed Truman to be totally committed to holding the Defense budget to its current level of \$13 billion or less, and he saw nothing on the horizon that could conceivably make the President budge from that position. On the whole, this realistic and ostensibly safe set of assumptions probably would have held up save for the crisis that soon unfolded in Korea.<sup>32</sup>

Acheson, in contrast, had high hopes for the study from the start. Not only did he expect it to yield fresh insights into the West's security problems, he saw it also as providing a useful vehicle for reordering national priorities, beginning with the military budget. By 1950, in the aftermath of the China debacle and with the growing demands of NATO, Acheson considered Johnson's military strategy of relying on nuclear weapons wholly impractical. Although the hydrogen bomb might buy the United States a little more time,

Acheson considered it a temporary advantage at best in view of the Soviet Union's demonstrated ability to match U.S. nuclear technology, as shown by its earlier than expected test of an atomic bomb. Slowly but surely, he thought, the margin of U.S. nuclear superiority would become less important. The result, Acheson feared, would be "a trend against us which, if allowed to continue, would lead to a considerable deterioration in our position."<sup>33</sup>

The alternative defense strategy that Acheson favored entailed building "situations of strength"—strong points around the globe—through which the United States could project its power and influence to contain Soviet expansion.<sup>34</sup> To give such a strategy credibility, he considered it necessary, first, to lessen American dependence on an all-or-nothing response with nuclear weapons; and second, to create a defense posture resting in the first instance on general purpose forces. U.S. and Soviet nuclear weapons, he thought, would eventually cancel one another out. Although Acheson did not reject the possibility of a full-scale East-West confrontation, he considered it far more likely that future conflicts would take the form of low-intensity regional wars. The outcomes of these wars would be determined not by the side possessing the greater nuclear capabilities, but by the side that could bring to bear superior conventional military power.<sup>35</sup>

Like Johnson, Acheson relied on subordinates to do the spade work of assembling information for the study and drafting recommendations. To head the State Department contingent he picked Paul H. Nitze, George Kennan's successor as Director of Policy Planning. Young, ambitious, and forceful, Nitze found the Defense representatives at first reluctant to discuss any measures that might result in a significant change in the U.S. defense posture or boost military spending. But as time went on, their resistance weakened, causing Nitze to conclude that there was a revolt brewing against Johnson at the Pentagon. According to Nitze:

*Louis Johnson had so drummed into their heads the need for holding the military budget to thirteen billion dollars that they found it hard even to contemplate a proposal that might result in a military budget increased by more than five billion dollars per year. Initially, they wanted a few more air groups, a couple of additional divisions, and a few more ships, but that was about all. It was not until we had had a week or two of discussions that General [Truman H.] Landon [the senior Joint Chiefs of Staff representative] accepted the idea that we were engaged not in a mere horse-trading budget exercise, but in a fundamental reassessment of the requirements of our national security policy, as the President had directed. From that point on, things progressed smoothly as we wrote our report with growing consensus on what the thrust of it should be.*<sup>36</sup>

While Nitze may have overestimated the extent of the military's willingness to challenge Johnson's defense policies, he was basically correct in sensing their mood and using it to Acheson's advantage. The resulting report—designated NSC 68 in mid-April 1950—reflected a variety of complaints, but none more clearly than Acheson's. He believed that given the expected growth in Soviet military power, the United States needed to reduce its dependence on nuclear weapons and increase the size and flexibility of its Armed Forces in order to contain Soviet expansionism. In addition, NSC 68 urged a revived military role for West Germany and Japan; sizable increases in foreign propaganda, covert operations, intelligence-gathering, and analysis; and stepped-up military aid to U.S. friends and allies.<sup>37</sup> Although the report offered few concrete indications of how large the buildup ought to be or what it might cost, Nitze and others on the State-Defense review group speculated that it might push the Defense budget alone to upwards of \$40 billion per year, with \$10 billion to \$15 billion more needed to cover increases in other national security programs.<sup>38</sup>

These daunting figures, more than enough to inspire caution on Truman's part, no doubt further strengthened Johnson's conviction that the entire exercise would ultimately prove a waste of time and energy. Although he joined Acheson in recommending the report for the President's consideration, he did so on the condition that any future action on its approval and implementation be handled through the NSC.<sup>39</sup> On April 12, 1950, Truman accepted Johnson's advice and agreed to take the report under advisement; meantime, he wanted the Bureau of the Budget and other economic advisors to give it a thorough going-over. These studies, along with a JCS review of military requirements, were still in progress when the Korean War erupted on June 25, 1950. Confronted with the sudden outbreak of hostilities and fearing an escalation of communist aggression elsewhere, Truman ordered U.S. combat troops into Korea and notified Congress that he would need supplemental appropriations for defense and military assistance. Finally, in late September 1950, he signed a memorandum (NSC 68/1) approving NSC 68 "as a statement of policy to be followed over the next four or five years."<sup>40</sup>

### Implementing NSC 68:

#### The Korean War and German Rearmament

While Johnson had worked relentlessly toward the goal of unifying the Armed Forces during his time as Secretary, his initial response to the North Korean invasion was to gain perspectives from the Services and allow those perspectives to be articulated to the Commander-in-Chief. By fostering communication between the Service Secretaries and senior policymakers, the Services had the chance to influence the U.S. response to the invasion. At a meeting with President Truman and senior staff at Blair House on June 25, Johnson encouraged the Service Secretaries to each present a response to the emergency. Moreover, while Johnson had championed the economization of the Pentagon prior to the invasion, he now had to take steps toward rearmament to support the war effort. Developments in Korea demanded that the military establishment abandon the isolation from the Department of State



*Secretary of Defense Johnson, General of the Army Douglas MacArthur, Commander, United Nations Command in the Far East, and General Omar Bradley, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, on reviewing stand during Johnson's visit to Tokyo, June 19, 1950.*

*(U.S. Army/Truman Presidential Library, used with permission)*

in policy development that Johnson had worked to create and to instead establish solid links with both State and Treasury. Two of the tenets of the Johnson Pentagon, centralization of power and economy, were beginning to lose standing as the Korean War commenced.<sup>41</sup>

Whether Truman would have approved NSC 68 had the Korean War not intervened cannot be known; the available historical studies and sources suggest no clear evidence. The most solid indication that he was favorably disposed toward the report, but not overly so, comes from a conversation he had in late May 1950 with Director of the Bureau of the Budget Frederick J. Lawton. According to Lawton's notes of their meeting: "The President indicated that we [the Bureau of the Budget] were to continue to raise questions that we had on this program [the modernization called for in NSC 68] and that it definitely was not as large in scope as some of the people seem to think."<sup>42</sup> This suggests that while the President was willing to entertain changes here and there, he did not regard NSC 68 (as some did, then and later) as the blueprint for a major departure of policy toward a peacetime rearmament program of unprecedented proportions. Judging from subsequent events, the emergency in Korea



and its various spinoffs, rather than NSC 68, hastened the buildup of military forces and increased the reliance on military options that came to typify American foreign policy in the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>43</sup>

As much as anything, NSC 68 provided a convenient and durable rationale for comprehensive planning, the prototype for the all-inclusive, annual basic national security papers that became standard procedure until the John F. Kennedy administration discarded the practice in the early 1960s. But its contents—broadly worded and vague about costs and ultimate objectives—were open to a variety of interpretations. Little wonder, then, that Acheson saw the report as less a call to action than a lever for manipulating policy, defense policy in particular. “The purpose of NSC-68,” he insisted in his memoirs, “was to so bludgeon the mass mind of ‘top government’ that not only could the President make a decision but that the decision could be carried out.”<sup>44</sup>

While Acheson expected others to fall in line behind NSC 68, both he and Johnson chose to treat its recommendations selectively. A case in point was the rearmament of West Germany, which Johnson and the Joint Chiefs favored in order to help overcome NATO’s manpower shortages and to counter the ongoing buildup of a Soviet-supplied East German defense force; Acheson opposed it as diplomatically ill timed, if not ill advised. Despite the absence in NSC 68 of any specific endorsement of West German rearmament, it was clear that the authors were sympathetic to taking steps in that direction. Seizing on this apparent breakthrough, the JCS asked Acheson to raise the question of West German rearmament, starting with a token force of 5,000, at the May 1950 meeting of the North Atlantic Council. Acheson, while acknowledging the potential benefits of a German contribution, declined to do so, citing the likelihood of French objections and the damage that might be done to Allied relations. With the outbreak of the Korean War, however, Johnson’s continued prodding soon brought Truman’s intercession and a reversal of policy. The upshot—the so-called package plan, which provided for West German rearmament, a strengthened

American military presence in Europe, and appointment of a NATO Supreme Allied Commander—was laid before the other Allies in September 1950. But as Acheson had expected, stiff French resistance to a rearmed Germany effectively blocked any immediate decision. The Plevin Plan, the French alternative calling for creation of a composite European Defense Force, was the subject of protracted argument for the next several years.<sup>45</sup>

As it turned out, the West German rearmament question was the last significant foreign policy matter in which Louis Johnson participated. Amid the early setbacks the United States suffered in Korea, Johnson’s cost-cutting policies had to be reversed, while his well-publicized quarrels with Acheson conveyed the impression of disorganization and indecision in the upper echelons of government. With the administration now gearing up for a war in Asia and a military buildup in Europe, Johnson had become a liability to the President. By July 1950, Truman began to explore the appointment of retired General of the Army and former Secretary of State George C. Marshall as the third Secretary of Defense. By early September, Marshall and Truman had agreed to a short tenure for Marshall as Secretary, setting the stage for Johnson’s departure. While Johnson largely succeeded in implementing Truman’s defense austerity programs, his political position on Taiwan and the clashes with Acheson that complicated the making of foreign policy no doubt helped precipitate the end of his career in September 1950.<sup>46</sup>

### **The Changing of the Guard**

From outward appearances, Johnson’s departure may have seemed a turning point in the institutional development of U.S. national security policy. With the Korean War to validate Acheson’s prediction of the serious danger posed by the Soviet Union, and with NSC 68 to provide timely guidance on how to respond, the Secretary of State was in a remarkably strong position to establish himself as the overall manager of foreign and defense affairs—much the same role that Forrestal had tried to play.<sup>47</sup> The notion that the

emerging institutional setup seemed headed in the same direction that Forrestal had once envisioned—toward concentrating national security responsibilities and authority in a single member of the Cabinet—remained just that: a notion.

Such a system failed to develop partly because when faced with the crisis in Korea, Truman turned to the most respected figure he could find to restore the Pentagon's credibility: George Marshall, whom Truman had once described in a *Kansas City Star* interview as “the greatest living American.”<sup>48</sup> Such veneration, which Truman apparently never lost, all but guaranteed Marshall a close association with the President. Acheson, also an admirer of Marshall, had little inclination to challenge the new Secretary of Defense's advice. In contrast to the tension that characterized the relationship between Johnson and Acheson, the new Secretary of Defense enjoyed excellent relations with the Secretary of State, and the two consistently worked together and took steps to foster closer Defense-State links.<sup>49</sup>

Besides enjoying the President's confidence, Marshall had two additional assets that gave him a leg up on his new job. One, of course, was his celebrated capacity for objectivity and nonpartisan detachment in analyzing problems, reinforced by his broad experience in and personal familiarity with foreign and defense matters. Not only had Marshall emerged during his tenure as Secretary of State (1947–1949) as an accomplished diplomat, but he also was the country's “First Soldier”—the “organizer of victory” in World War II who, as Chief of Staff, had planned and orchestrated the War Department's role in victory over the Axis. No other individual at the time—in or out of government—possessed this combination of such admirable qualities.

Another of Marshall's remarkable attributes was his ability to surround himself with able and effective aides, advisors, and deputies, a skill honed during his many years of overseeing Army staff work. Marshall's choice of Robert A. Lovett to serve as his




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*Secretary of State Dean Acheson, President Truman, and Secretary of Defense Marshall in Washington, DC, December 26, 1950.*

*(Truman Presidential Library, used with permission)*

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Deputy Secretary of Defense was especially important, for it gave the department a discreet backstage manager, one devoid of personal ambition and committed to the same high sense of integrity and professional standards as his superior. A New York investment banker in private life, as Forrestal had been, Lovett was a practiced hand in the defense business and foreign affairs as well, having served as Assistant Secretary of War for Air in World War II and, afterward, as Marshall's Undersecretary of State. The aging Marshall appears to have reached an understanding with Truman that Lovett would take over as Secretary of Defense after a year, and the seamless handoff of responsibilities in 1951 was planned from the onset of Marshall's term.<sup>50</sup> The tenures of the two Secretaries can be considered as essentially one continuous term of office, given their similar views and perspectives on budgeting, security issues, and the role of the Secretary of Defense.

In stark contrast to the confrontational tone of Johnson's tenure, Marshall and Lovett both stressed the need for sound working relations between State and Defense—what Lovett termed “constant, close and sympathetic cooperation” between the two departments.<sup>51</sup> This included not only increased contacts at the uppermost levels of policymaking but also direct consultations on a regular basis involving State's regional Assistant Secretaries, the Policy Planning Staff, and the Joint Chiefs, something that Johnson had strictly forbidden. As Acheson summarized the new situation:

*For the first time and, perhaps, though I am not sure, the last, the Secretaries of State and Defense, with their top advisers, met with the Chiefs of Staff in their map room and discussed common problems together. At one of these meetings General [Omar] Bradley [Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff] and I made a treaty, thereafter scrupulously observed. The phrases “from a military point of view” and “from a political point of view” were excluded from our talks. No such dichotomy existed. Each of us had our tactical and strategic problems, but they were interconnected, not separate.<sup>52</sup>*

At the same time, in a move that further strengthened the policy process, Truman began paying closer attention to the National Security Council. Obviously worried that the war in Korea could have far-reaching repercussions, Truman ordered in July 1950 that the NSC meet every Thursday and that it streamline its operations to provide more timely and systematic advice. One of the innovations he approved was the creation of a senior NSC staff, composed of council members’ deputies (usually at the Assistant Secretary level), to expedite the coordination of staff-level work and to handle the expected increase in NSC business. Though still leery of the NSC, Truman was growing to appreciate its usefulness, and in the current emergency he seemed to feel that he would need all the help he could get.<sup>53</sup>

Indeed, as the war intensified, the United States sought to expand its network of military commitments both to thwart the North Korean aggression and to shore up anticommunist defenses elsewhere. Events appeared to bear out NSC 68’s ominous prediction of increasingly militant Soviet behavior. In response, military spending surged, from \$13.5 billion in new obligational authority in FY50 to \$48 billion in FY51 and \$60 billion in FY52, dropping to \$44 billion in FY53. Foreign military assistance, atomic energy, intelligence-gathering and analysis, and other areas of the national security budget registered similar sharp rises.<sup>54</sup>

With these increases in defense and national security spending, Acheson and the State Department felt more confident and comfortable teaming with Defense in pursuit of a more active foreign policy and making promises of American aid and other support that would have been unheard of a few years earlier. Some of the obligations the United States took on, such as the acquisition of overseas bomber bases around the periphery of the PRC and the Soviet Union, stemmed directly from the high priority that U.S. war plans attached to strategic airpower.<sup>55</sup> Others—the assignment of U.S. combat troops to Europe in 1951, the creation of a multinational NATO high command, the welcoming of Greece and Turkey into NATO, and the signing of mutual security treaties with Japan, Australia, and New Zealand—went well beyond previous U.S. commitments.

The most important national security issues during Marshall’s tenure were the recall of General Douglas MacArthur and the “Great Debate” over the stationing of U.S. forces in Western Europe in support of NATO. Though isolationists and others objected during the “Great Debate” in 1950–1951 to sending U.S. divisions to West Germany, Congress and the American public were, on the whole, remarkably acquiescent. Marshall’s testimony in February 1951 in support of the President’s NATO policy before joint Congressional committees helped persuade Congress to act favorably on the issue. Truman’s relief of MacArthur as Commander of the United Nations forces in Korea in April 1951 occasioned a passionate and bitter national debate that culminated in Senate joint committee hearings. For much of the long and tiring week of May 7–14, 1951, Marshall testified at great length before the committee, enduring harsh, unfriendly personal attacks from Republican Senators. Once again, as in the “Great Debate” hearings, Marshall’s measured, thoughtful, compelling testimony affirming the President’s decision helped greatly to carry the day, gaining the support of a large majority of the joint committee.<sup>56</sup>

During this hectic and trying period in 1951, Marshall and Lovett maintained their focus on ensuring effective and efficient staff support in handling foreign affairs. A larger Defense establishment with greatly enhanced responsibilities meant, of course, increased work for the Secretary of Defense, particularly in the handling of foreign affairs. In fact, the Secretary now found himself as often as the Secretary of State at the forefront of representing U.S. interests abroad. Effective and efficient staff support thus became all the more important, not only to guarantee the smooth administration

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*Cabinet and staff members greet President Truman upon his return from the conference on Wake Island with General Douglas MacArthur, October 18, 1950. Left to right: Special Assistant to the President Averell Harriman, Secretary of Defense George Marshall, President Truman, Secretary of State Dean Acheson, Secretary of the Treasury John Snyder, Secretary of the Army Frank Pace, and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Omar Bradley.*



*(Abbie Rowel/Truman Presidential Library, used with permission)*

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of burgeoning programs but to provide timely policy advice and coordination as well.<sup>57</sup> Like Forrestal and Johnson before them, Marshall and Lovett attached such high importance to these matters that they kept them as close as possible at a high institutional level. Given the new title of Assistant for International Security Affairs (ISA) in January 1951, Burns remained in charge of what was quickly becoming the Pentagon's most far-flung operation, with worldwide interests and responsibilities.<sup>58</sup> But as a part-timer, he recognized that his usefulness was nearing an end. Forced for

health reasons to step down that summer, he yielded the position to Frank C. Nash, one of the many Forrestal protégés still around the Pentagon.<sup>59</sup>

Under Nash, a lawyer by training and a civil servant most of his life, the Office of International Security Affairs (OISA) confirmed its status as a pivotal organization in the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD).<sup>60</sup> Though small by comparison with other OSD offices, it operated under a broad charter that gave the Assistant for ISA responsibility to develop and recommend positions to the Secretary and authority to coordinate “all activities” within the Defense Department relating to international security affairs.<sup>61</sup> OISA, organized along functional lines, had four major units by 1952: the Office of Foreign Military Affairs, which focused on policy and long-range plans; the Office of North Atlantic Treaty Affairs, which handled liaison with NATO; the Office of Foreign Economic Defense Affairs; and the Office of Military Assistance, which coordinated and processed military aid requests. In addition, smaller, separate offices dealt with NSC Affairs, European Mutual Security Affairs, and Psychological Policy Affairs.<sup>62</sup> The last provided support and assistance to the Deputy Secretary in his capacity as the Defense member of the Psychological Strategy Board, a policy-advisory body established in April 1951 to assist the NSC in mounting anti-Soviet propaganda.<sup>63</sup>

Nash involved himself intimately in practically every detail of OISA's operations, serving as a key aide to Marshall and Lovett in policymaking. The Assistant for ISA, one of the Pentagon's most high-profile jobs, required a judicious mix of administrative and diplomatic skills that continuously underscored the increasingly close relationship between military affairs and foreign policy.<sup>64</sup>

### **The Marshall-Lovett Legacy**

From 1950 on, with the Korean War providing most of the impetus, the Secretary of Defense came to exercise influence over



diplomatic, political, and fiscal policy to a degree much exceeding that of the first two Secretaries. This was true not only in such areas as NATO matters and military assistance, where one would expect the Secretary to play a prominent role, but also in other aspects of foreign policy with less obvious political-military dimensions, such as helping to formulate the American mediating position in the Anglo-Iranian oil dispute. Even though the Middle East oil situation had attracted the attention of U.S. military planners for years, Defense officials had largely stayed out of the complex economic diplomacy of that region until 1951–1952, when events in Iran persuaded Lovett that a communist takeover there might be imminent. Lovett thought that U.S. intervention, in one form or another, “tantamount to the extension of the Truman Doctrine to Iran,” would eventually be unavoidable.<sup>65</sup> Yet it was carving a path through the American antitrust laws and helping effect a reconciliation between Tehran and London rather than refining plans for U.S. military involvement that claimed his attention. Although the oil industry was being targeted over antitrust issues, Lovett saw the participation of these companies as crucial to providing the oil-driven economic growth that would help prevent the emergence of communism in Iran. As the Iran episode suggests, the Defense Department’s interests abroad had widened beyond military issues, making it increasingly difficult to draw a line between the Department of State’s responsibilities on the one hand and those of the Pentagon on the other.<sup>66</sup>

Despite the enlarged role in foreign policy making while Marshall and Lovett were in office, the Secretary of Defense never replaced the Secretary of State as the President’s principal foreign policy advisor. Nor did he become, as Forrestal had unrealistically envisioned, the chief coordinator of national security affairs.<sup>67</sup> The heightened visibility of their job notwithstanding, Marshall and Lovett always considered themselves facilitators rather than operators in the international arena, even though their involvement in policymaking was greater than Forrestal’s or Johnson’s had ever

been. They viewed their main job as providing the material means, at the right time and place, to achieve the foreign policy objectives set by Acheson and President Truman. They viewed themselves as supporting actors rather than as the lead performers.

There were several reasons for this behavior. One explanation suggested by scholars is that it was part of a conscious effort by Marshall and Lovett to preserve and reinforce the principle of civilian control of the military.<sup>68</sup> As Lovett once characterized it, “The military professionals should be contributors to, and not makers of, national political policies,” including foreign policy.<sup>69</sup> Consequently, while Lovett strongly endorsed military involvement at the staff level in developing policy, he deplored giving the military a larger voice in the final decision. This had the practical effect of not only strengthening a longstanding American tradition but at the same time reaffirming the Secretary of Defense’s direction, authority, and control over the Services. By deferring to Acheson’s lead, Marshall and Lovett were sending a message to the military chiefs that their job was to carry out policy, not originate it, and that they should look to the Secretary of Defense to represent their views and interests.<sup>70</sup>

As important as maintaining civilian control may have been, however, it does not fully explain why Marshall and Lovett did not exercise greater power and influence in international affairs. The simplest and most obvious explanation is that they had their hands full with other problems that limited the time they could devote to foreign affairs. Because of the Korean emergency and the ensuing military buildup, their first priority often tended to be routine housekeeping business. Their days (Lovett’s especially) were taken up with reviewing the details of budget requests, establishing priorities for the allocation of resources, fixing production and procurement problems, and similar routine yet essential and exacting tasks. Keeping abreast of these problems was probably as much as they could feasibly do.<sup>71</sup>

The complexity of dealing with issues of foreign affairs and national security, as well as the onerous nature of a Defense Secretary's other responsibilities, made Marshall's and Lovett's jobs all the more difficult. The idea of what constituted American "national security" underwent a steady transformation after 1945.<sup>72</sup> Starting as a fairly narrow idea, with military affairs the primary component, it evolved into something probably broader than even Forrestal had imagined. Under the conceptual framework suggested in NSC 68, it acquired an almost all-inclusive quality in which military, economic, and foreign affairs coexisted, sometimes uneasily, with new ventures in psychological warfare, foreign propaganda, covert operations, and other unconventional extensions of American power and influence abroad. With no guiding precedent in developing and managing policy for such a wide range of activities, many of them unfamiliar, the Truman administration had to learn from experience. By 1953, there had emerged a sort of triumvirate for national security composed of Acheson, Lovett, and White House special assistant W. Averell Harriman, a former Ambassador to the Soviet Union who had also been instrumental in setting up and running the European Recovery Program. Although it had its awkward moments, the triumvirate approach proved, for the most part, a workable and satisfactory arrangement for all involved. "During this period," one aide recalled, "the three men—Lovett, Acheson, and Harriman—were very close to each other, knew how each other's mind worked, and had great respect for each other."<sup>73</sup> Obviously an uncommon but nonetheless healthy arrangement, it would not occur often. Yet it served a highly useful and productive purpose at the time.<sup>74</sup>

Finally, even if Marshall and Lovett had wanted to play a larger role in foreign affairs, it is doubtful that they could have convinced themselves that it would be in the Defense Department's interest to do so. Quite apart from any philosophic qualms they may have had, they found it hard to imagine that Congress or the American people would ever tolerate a large peacetime defense establishment, not only because of the supposed threat it might pose to American




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*President Truman and Secretary of Defense Lovett confer in the Oval Office, ca. 1952.*

*(Truman Presidential Library, used with permission)*

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liberties, but also because of the foreign entanglements that might ensue. Marshall remembered well the isolationism and miniscule defense budgets of the interwar years and the posthaste demobilization that followed World War II. He felt certain that the high level of defense spending occasioned by the Korean War would never last and that deep cuts, probably accompanied by a revival of isolationism, were virtually inevitable upon the return of more normal peacetime conditions.<sup>75</sup> As Secretary of Defense, he saw his job as achieving what some termed a "sustainable" level of defense in the sense that it would enjoy long-term popular backing and not become a crippling drain on the Nation's economy. Marshall confronted the challenge of adopting the strategic posture of arming the republic that had been advocated in NSC 68 and winning the war in Korea with approaches that emphasized political and economic feasibility. With Lovett pushing for organizational coordination and fiscal responsibility, the department was able to take measures attempting to control its budgeting. While Marshall understood the monumental importance of building up the defenses of the United States at the time, he sought a prudent military buildup that would allow long-term stability rather than a huge development of the military oriented toward the short term.<sup>76</sup>

Lovett's reasoning, while somewhat different, basically led to the same conclusion. As a private citizen serving in spring 1950 as a consultant to the policy review group that had drafted NSC

68, Lovett had strongly endorsed the notion of an all-around strengthening of the American defense posture to combat the growing Soviet threat. “Anything we do short of an all-out effort,” he said, suggesting no allowance for possible exaggeration, “is inexcusable.”<sup>77</sup> But as Marshall’s deputy and later as Secretary of Defense, he found himself facing a difficult dilemma. “What we needed,” he acknowledged, “was a stable Army, Navy, and Air Force.”<sup>78</sup> Perhaps more than Marshall, Lovett could well imagine the military and, by extension, the Secretary of Defense playing a larger and more active part in American foreign policy. Yet he candidly acknowledged the constraints as a Secretary that fiscal limitations and the budget process imposed.

## Conclusion

The Korean buildup, rather than making the Secretary’s role in foreign affairs clearer and more focused, left it in some ways less distinct than before. Obviously, with the growth of U.S. commitments abroad, the Secretary’s role took on an added dimension that required him to devote more attention to problems overseas. Even so, Marshall and Lovett had trouble conceiving their job as one in which foreign affairs might become their central concern. They operated, as had Johnson (but for different reasons), within a fairly restricted, self-imposed sphere. Johnson’s main purpose was to protect what he saw as the department’s interests, though as a member of the NSC and as an advisor to the President, he also regarded himself operating as Acheson’s equal. Marshall and Lovett aimed to encourage a working partnership between State and Defense, in support and furtherance of U.S. foreign policy to the extent of available resources. Either way, it was a role vastly different but probably no less demanding than the coordinator’s job that Forrestal had expected the Secretary to play.

Nonetheless, the institutional and global environment in which the Secretary of Defense functioned was changing rapidly. With the intensification of the Cold War from 1950 on, the military

component was fast becoming one of the most crucial elements of U.S. foreign policy, chiefly because to many policymakers, it seemed the only expression of U.S. power likely to command respect in Moscow and thereby affect Soviet thinking and behavior. This perception of the nature of the Soviet threat and the corresponding importance of military power in shaping American responses effectively rendered obsolete any lingering belief in a sharp distinction between defense policy and foreign policy. No longer could military affairs be treated as a monopoly of the military or foreign policy as a monopoly of the diplomats. What was emerging was a more complex pattern of organization and conduct of national security policy in which the Department of Defense would necessarily continue to play a vital part.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Keith D. McFarland and David L. Roll, *Louis Johnson and the Arming of America: The Roosevelt and Truman Years* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005). Chapter nine provides a detailed synopsis of Louis Johnson's role as a fundraiser for the Truman campaign, the downfall of James Forrestal, and the subsequent ascent of Johnson as the second Secretary of Defense.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. Johnson's uneasiness about a transatlantic security agreement is mentioned in terms of his 1948 speech to the Daughters of the American Revolution, in which he spoke out against U.S. participation in an alliance (236–237). This work also argues that Johnson risked “military preparedness,” a concept he had embraced throughout his career, for the sake of maintaining a positive relationship with President Truman. This concept was put at risk through the decreases in defense expenditure advanced by both Johnson and Truman (359–360).

<sup>3</sup> Arthur B. Darling, “The Central Intelligence Agency: An Instrument of Government, to 1950,” 2 vols., sanitized version; manuscript, Historical Staff, Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), December 1953, 19.

<sup>4</sup> Roger T. Trask and Alfred Goldberg, *The Department of Defense, 1947–1997: Organization and Leaders* (Washington, DC: Historical Office, Office of the Secretary of Defense [OSD], 1997), 14–16.

<sup>5</sup> Steven L. Rearden, *History of the Office of the Secretary of Defense*, volume I, *The Formative Years, 1947–1950* (Washington, DC: Historical Office, OSD, 1984), 369–384, 410–413. On the anxieties that Johnson's advent generated, especially in the Navy, see Jeffrey G. Barlow, *Revolt of the Admirals: The Fight for Naval Aviation, 1945–1950* (Washington, DC: Naval Historical Center, 1994). Also see McFarland and Roll, who discuss the infringements Johnson made upon the autonomy of the Service branches, including suspending Service Days and seeking the cancellation of the Navy's supercarrier. The Navy in particular perceived that its back was against the wall due to the supercarrier debacle and Johnson's pursuit of a B-36 procurement for the Air Force, which was perceived to strengthen the Air Force vis-à-vis the Navy. Both of these moves by Johnson were vehemently opposed by the Navy (see chapter 10).



<sup>6</sup> Exactly why Johnson dropped this practice is unclear, but it may have had as much to do with a personnel shakeup at the State Department as with Johnson's disinclination to continue the briefings. Bohlen was reassigned as Ambassador to France in late 1949 and was thereafter unavailable for consultations. Kennan, meanwhile, found himself increasingly at odds with prevailing policy decisions following Acheson's appointment as Secretary of State. Eventually, Acheson nudged him out of the Policy Planning Staff and promoted him to the post of Counselor (Bohlen's former job) as of January 1, 1950, where he no longer exercised any direct influence over policy.

<sup>7</sup> Memo, Johnson for Secretary of the Army et al., August 31, 1949 (subject: State-Defense Liaison), International Security Affairs (ISA) Notebook, OSD Historian's files. Also see Walter Millis with Harvey C. Mansfield and Harold Stein, *Arms and the State: Civil-Military Elements in National Policy* (New York: Twentieth Century Fund, 1958), 234–236; and Charles A. Stevenson, *SECDEF: The Nearly Impossible Job of the Secretary of Defense* (Washington, DC: Potomac Books, 2006). Secretary Johnson's limitations on communications between the Departments of Defense and State are mentioned as a means by Johnson to protect the position of the former in influencing policy, 11.

<sup>8</sup> Memo, Johnson for Secretary of the Army et al., July 14, 1949 (subject: Communications with the Department of State), OSD Directives Book, Doc. No. I–G–9, OSD Historian's files.

<sup>9</sup> Dean Acheson, *Present at the Creation* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1969), 374.

<sup>10</sup> McFarland and Roll, 224–231. The authors mention the tension between Johnson and Acheson when it came to the National Security Council (NSC), specifically in the context of the drafting of NSC 68. They highlight that Johnson took substantial measures to safeguard the Defense Department from the State Department. These tensions were visible in a March 22, 1950, meeting at the State Department, in which Johnson's isolation from the NSC 68 drafting process led him to make clear his disappointment with the State Department and Secretary Acheson in controlling the drafting process. Melvyn P. Leffler, *A Preponderance of Power: National Security, the Truman Administration, and the Cold War* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), 358.

<sup>11</sup> McFarland and Roll, 205–233. They describe the U.S. military development that began in 1948 and grew as a result of the 1949 Soviet nuclear test, particularly in terms of strategic bombing capabilities, investment in nuclear weapons, and the development of hydrogen weapons in addition to more conventional military capabilities.

<sup>12</sup> One of the best overall accounts of the Alliance is Lawrence S. Kaplan, *NATO and the United States: The Enduring Alliance*, rev. ed. (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1994). Also see Richard W. Barnet, *The Alliance: America, Europe, Japan—Makers of the Postwar World* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983); and A.W. DePorte, *Europe Between the Superpowers* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979).

<sup>13</sup> See Johnson's testimony in *North Atlantic Treaty, Hearings Before the Committee on Foreign Relations*, U.S. Senate, 81<sup>st</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> sess., April 28, 1949 (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office [GPO], 1949), 146; and Rearden, *Formative Years*, 474–475.

<sup>14</sup> McFarland and Roll, 236–238. The authors point out that Johnson did not look favorably upon the North Atlantic Treaty initially. Even outside of the scope of the Daughters of the American Revolution speech, Johnson is described as being troubled by the prospect of the Alliance during a briefing prior to becoming Secretary. However, Johnson later defended the treaty in his congressional testimony, insisting that the treaty would not make it possible for Europe or any other country to commit the United States to war.

<sup>15</sup> McFarland and Roll, 245–249.

<sup>16</sup> Lawrence S. Kaplan, *A Community of Interests: NATO and the Military Assistance Program, 1948–1951* (Washington, DC: Historical Office, OSD, 1980), 41.

<sup>17</sup> Burns served as an aide when Johnson was Assistant Secretary of War from 1937–1940.

<sup>18</sup> Memo, Johnson for Secretary of the Army et al., August 3, 1949 (subject: Organization for Handling Politico-Military Matters in the NME [National Military Establishment]), ISA Notebook, OSD Historian's files.

<sup>19</sup> Rearden, *Formative Years*, 70–71.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), “Estimate of the Effects of the Soviet Possession of the Atomic Bomb Upon the Security of the United States and Upon the Probabilities of Direct Soviet Military Action,” ORE 91–49, April 6, 1950, Intelligence File, President's Secretary's File, Truman Papers. See Enclosure A, in which the CIA estimates that by 1954, the Soviet Union could have the nuclear capabilities to deliver the 200 weapons estimated to be required to have a greatly deleterious impact on U.S. security.

<sup>22</sup> See, for example, David Halberstam, *The Coldest Winter* (New York: Hyperion Books, 2007).

<sup>23</sup> See draft memo by Kennan, February 17, 1950, in *Foreign Relations of the United States* [hereafter FRUS] 1950, vol. I, *National Security Affairs; Foreign Economic Policy* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1977), 160–167.

<sup>24</sup> The best accounts of the H-bomb controversy are McGeorge Bundy, *Danger and Survival: Choices About the Bomb in the First Fifty Years* (New York: Random House, 1988), 197–235; Richard G. Hewlett and Francis Duncan, *A History of the United States Atomic Energy Commission*, vol. II, *Atomic Shield, 1947–1952* (Washington, DC: Atomic Energy Commission, 1972), 362–409; Herbert F. York, *The Advisors: Oppenheimer, Teller, and the Superbomb*, rev. ed. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989); Warner R. Schilling, “The H-Bomb Decision: How to Decide Without Actually Choosing,” *Political Science Quarterly* 76 (March 1961), 24–46; McFarland and Roll, 219–224; and Richard Rhodes, *Dark Sun: The Making of the Hydrogen Bomb* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995).

<sup>25</sup> Doris M. Condit, *History of the Office of the Secretary of Defense*, vol. II, *The Test of War: 1950–1953* (Washington, DC: Historical Office, OSD, 1988), 173–174.

<sup>26</sup> Leffler, 333–337; McFarland and Roll, 253–264.

<sup>27</sup> Johnson testimony, *Joint Hearings: Military Situation in the Far East and the Facts Surrounding the Relief of General of the Army Douglas MacArthur From His Assignments in that Area*, Senate Committees on Armed Services and Foreign Relations, 82<sup>d</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> sess., June 14, 1951 (Washington, DC: GPO, 1951), 2578.

<sup>28</sup> McFarland and Roll, 261–264, and Condit, 173–174. Both claim that Acheson’s National Press Club speech may have set the stage for the North Korean invasion and highlight the fact that while Acheson and Truman were backing the policy toward Formosa, several Members of Congress were not behind the policy.

<sup>29</sup> NSC Action no. 270, January 2, 1950, Office of the Secretary of Defense Record Group (RG) 218, Combined Chiefs of Staff 334 (9–25–47), sec. 2.

<sup>30</sup> Condit, 455–482.

<sup>31</sup> Memo, Johnson for Joint Chiefs of Staff, February 3, 1950 (subject: Re-examination of Strategic Objectives and Plans), RG 330, CD 16–1–17.

<sup>32</sup> Meeting, Armed Forces Policy Council, February 21, 1950 (subject: 1952 Budget), John H. Ohly Collection, Historical Office, OSD.

<sup>33</sup> Acheson, memorandum of conversation, March 24, 1950, in *FRUS 1950*, vol. I, 207. Also see Steven L. Rearden, “Frustrating the Kremlin Design: Acheson and NSC 68,” in *Dean Acheson and the Making of U.S. Foreign Policy*, ed. Douglas Brinkley (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1993), 159–175.

<sup>34</sup> See, for example, Dean Acheson, “‘Total Diplomacy’ to Strengthen U.S. Leadership for Human Freedom,” *Department of State Bulletin* 22, March 20, 1950.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> Paul H. Nitze with Ann M. Smith and Steven L. Rearden, *From Hiroshima to Glasnost: At the Center of Decision—A Memoir* (New York: Grove, Weidenfeld, 1989), 94.

<sup>37</sup> See NSC 68, “U.S. Objectives and Programs for National Security,” April 14, 1950, in *Containment: Documents on American Policy and Strategy, 1945–1950*, ed. Thomas H. Etzold and John Lewis Gaddis (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), 385–442.

<sup>38</sup> Nitze, *From Hiroshima to Glasnost*, 98; Paul Y. Hammond, “NSC–68: Prologue to Rearmament,” in Warner R. Schilling, Paul Y. Hammond, and Glenn H. Snyder, *Strategy, Politics, and Defense Budgets* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962), 321.

<sup>39</sup> Memo, Johnson for Truman, April 11, 1950 (subject: Re-Exam. of U.S. Objectives and Strategic Plans), RG 330, CD 16–1–17.

<sup>40</sup> Minutes, 68<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the NSC, September 29, 1950, NSC Meetings File, 1945–1953, Box 181, President’s Secretary’s Files, Truman Papers.

<sup>41</sup> Condit, 31–32; McFarland and Roll, 278–281.

<sup>42</sup> Memo for the Record, May 23, 1950 (subject: Meeting with the President), Frederick J. Lawton Papers, box 6, Truman Library.

<sup>43</sup> For a more thorough discussion, see Samuel R. Williamson, Jr., and Steven L. Rearden, *The Origins of U.S. Nuclear Strategy, 1945–1953* (New York: St. Martin’s, 1993), 131–159.

<sup>44</sup> Acheson, *Present at the Creation*, 374.

<sup>45</sup> Thomas Alan Schwartz, *America’s Germany: John J. McCloy and the Federal Republic of Germany* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), 116–155. Also see Laurence W. Martin, “The American Decision to Rearm Germany,” in Harold Stein, ed., *American Civil-Military Decisions: A Book of Case Studies* (Birmingham: University of Alabama Press, 1963), 645–663.

<sup>46</sup> McFarland and Roll, 339–340, 350, 359–363. While discussing the end of Johnson’s career, the authors offer several likely explanations for Truman replacing Johnson, among which are the differences between Johnson and Acheson, his position on Formosa, and the difficulties encountered in the Korea campaign.

<sup>47</sup> Benjamin O. Fordham, *Building the Cold War Consensus: The Political Economy of U.S. National Security Policy, 1949–51* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1998), 69–70. Acheson met with Representative Christian Herter in 1950, at which time he stated that he believed the Soviet Union would provoke a conflict. This statement was made in the context of the Truman administration’s push for military buildup as per NSC 68.

<sup>48</sup> Quoted in Alexander De Conde, “George C. Marshall, 1947–1949,” in *An Uncertain Tradition: American Secretaries of State in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Norman A. Graebner (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1961), 247.

<sup>49</sup> Leffler, 363–364.

<sup>50</sup> McFarland and Roll, 340, and Stevenson, 12, posit that Lovett had been “groomed” to become Secretary after Marshall. See also Condit, 36–39. While it is not explicitly stated that there was a quid pro quo with Marshall becoming Secretary of Defense that involved Lovett, it is stated that Lovett was an essential component to Marshall’s leadership as Secretary. Upon leaving the Pentagon, Marshall is said to have told Lovett that he must assume leadership of the Defense Department.

<sup>51</sup> Quoted in Henry M. Jackson, ed., *The National Security Council: Jackson Subcommittee Papers on Policy-Making at the Presidential Level* (New York: Praeger, 1965), 82.

<sup>52</sup> Acheson, *Present at the Creation*, 441.

<sup>53</sup> Letter, Truman to Acheson, July 19, 1950, FRUS 1950, vol. I, 348–349; James S. Lay, Jr., and Robert H. Johnson, *Organizational History of the National Security Council during the Truman and Eisenhower Administrations* (Washington, DC: National Security Council, n.d.), 16–17; Nelson, “Truman and the NSC,” 373–378.

<sup>54</sup> Condit, 241, 259, 283.

<sup>55</sup> Williamson and Rearden, 161–174.

<sup>56</sup> Condit, 97–104.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 514–515.

<sup>58</sup> Memo, Marshall for Service Secretaries et al., January 11, 1951 (subject: Organization for International Security Affairs [OISA]), ISA Notebook, OSD Historian’s files.

<sup>59</sup> Letter, Burns to Truman, July 11, 1951, ISA Notebook, OSD Historian’s files.

<sup>60</sup> In 1949, the Secretary of Defense created the position of Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs. The position changed in 1953 to Assistant Secretary of Defense (International Security Affairs) based on Reorganization Plan No. 6, June 30, 1953, authorizing six new Assistant Secretaries of Defense.

<sup>61</sup> Memo from Lovett for Service Secretaries et al., November 3, 1951 (subject: Office of Asst. to SecDef for ISA); Department of Defense (DOD) Directive No. 5132.1 (formerly 20.08–1), November 3, 1951, “Assistant to SecDef, ISA.”

<sup>62</sup> Memo, Nash for OISA Directors, June 24, 1952 (subject: Directive to Directors), ISA Notebook, OSD Historian’s files.

<sup>63</sup> DOD Directive 5105.6, April 21, 1952 (subject: Organization, Office of Psychological Policy), ISA Notebook, OSD Historian’s files; Lay and Johnson, *NSC Organizational History*, 21–22.

<sup>64</sup> DOD Directive 5105.6, April 21, 1952 (subject: Organization, Office of Psychological Policy), ISA Notebook, OSD Historian’s files.

<sup>65</sup> Letter, Lovett to Acheson, October 24, 1952, RG 330, OISA files, box 2, Iran folder. Also see *FRUS 1952–1954*, vol. X, 510n.

<sup>66</sup> Leffler, 424, 479, 482–484.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 447–448. Military and security affairs were a critical part of foreign policy at this time, and the Department of Defense was the engine behind military and security policy. However, the leadership of Defense and State enjoyed extremely close ties during this time relative to Johnson’s time as Secretary of Defense.

<sup>68</sup> See Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1957); James M. Roherty, *Decisions of Robert S. McNamara: A Study of the Role of the Secretary of Defense* (Coral Gables: University of Miami Press, 1970); and Gene M. Lyons, “The New Civil-Military Relations,” *American Political Science Review* 55 (1961), 53–63.

<sup>69</sup> Quoted in Jackson, 80.

<sup>70</sup> Condit, 514–515, states that Marshall and Lovett would not always adopt policy positions aligned with the military leadership, and in the instance of the peace treaty with Japan, Marshall's position was more in tune with the State Department than the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

<sup>71</sup> Condit, 515, suggests that the Secretaries of Defense following Forrestal spent a great deal of time dealing with congressional issues, particularly with regard to the budget.

<sup>72</sup> See Christopher C. Shoemaker, *The NSC Staff: Counseling the President* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1991).

<sup>73</sup> Theodore Tannenwald, Jr., quoted in Francis H. Heller, ed., *The Truman White House: The Administration of the Presidency, 1945–1953* (Lawrence: Regents Press of Kansas, 1980), 155.

<sup>74</sup> Stevenson, 161–162. A more contemporary example of such a relationship playing out between the Secretary of Defense and another senior member of government can be found in the relationship between Donald Rumsfeld and Richard Cheney. Stevenson sheds light on aspects of this relationship, such as when Rumsfeld, as leader of the Office of Economic Opportunity, took Cheney aboard under the Nixon administration. Later, while White House Chief of Staff under President Gerald Ford, Rumsfeld picked Cheney to serve as Deputy Chief of Staff. Cheney would soon become Chief of Staff himself. Stevenson credits Cheney with helping influence Rumsfeld to accept the position of Secretary of Defense under President Ford. This is indicative of a level of respect and rapport between the two men similar to that seen among Lovett, Acheson, and Harriman.

<sup>75</sup> See Doris Condit interview with Lovett, June 7, 1976, OSD Oral History Collection, 6; and memo, Nitze for Acheson, July 31, 1951 (subject: Issues in NSC 114), FRUS 1951, vol. I, 111.

<sup>76</sup> Condit, 223–273.

<sup>77</sup> “Record of Meeting of State-Defense Policy Review Group, March 16, 1950,” *FRUS 1950*, vol. I, 198.

<sup>78</sup> Condit interview with Lovett, 6.

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