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SELLING NSC-68:

THE TRUMAN ADMINISTRATION, PUBLIC OPINION, AND THE POLITICS OF
MOBILIZATION, 1950-1951¹

Steven Casey

In the spring of 1950, as the joint study group charged with producing a reassessment of U.S. national security policy circulated a draft plan that would dramatically increase defense spending, the problem of how to sell such a lavish program to the American public dominated everyone's thinking. "Cohesion in our democracy is basic to U.S. security," insisted one consultant, "and the government was going to need assistance in getting public support for the national effort which would be called for." This would be far from easy, however, for America's democratic process—the very thing that set it apart from its enemies—was also a potential weakness. "I fear that the U.S. public would rapidly tire of such effort," lamented Edward R. Barrett, the assistant secretary of state for public affairs. "In the absence of real and continuing crises, a dictatorship can unquestionably outlast a democracy in a conventional armament race."²

How could this problem be overcome? In the large historiography on NSC-68 it is often suggested that the Truman administration deliberately devised an excessively simplistic and exaggerated information campaign, employing arguments that were "clearer than truth." Historians have long argued that from the Truman Doctrine onwards, the president and his advisers believed they could best drum up popular support for their Cold War policies by "scaring the hell out of America," by using overheated rhetoric that locked U.S. policy into an "ideological straightjacket," perhaps even by engendering a "war scare" to "deceive the nation."³ With respect to NSC-68, such arguments have been given greater force by two pieces of evidence that are aired in almost every historical account. One is the suggestion made by Barrett in March 1950 that it would be necessary to initiate a

“psychological scare campaign.” The other is Dean Acheson’s famous claim in his memoirs that “the task of a public officer seeking to explain or gain support for a major policy is not that of the writer of a doctoral thesis. Qualification must give way to simplicity of statement, nicety and nuance to bluntness, almost brutality, in carrying home the point.”⁴ Emphasizing these two comments, historians have frequently argued that the administration sought to sell NSC-68 “in dramatic, even exaggerated terms,” devising an information campaign that sought to “bludgeon” the minds of both top officials and the mass public.⁵

On its own, however, even this rhetoric would not have been sufficient to spark and sustain support for such a large defense buildup. As Acheson noted in one early discussion on how to sell NSC-68, “speeches alone would not do it, that people read and heard what was said and then turned their attention to other matters.” What was vital was an incident, a crisis in one of the many flashpoints of the Cold War. Seen in this light, the start of the Korean War on 24-25 June 1950 was a godsend. In the literature, historians have certainly been quick to posit a clear and simple relationship between NSC-68 and Korea, arguing that the sudden and brazen nature of the North Korean attack validated NSC-68’s alarming diagnosis of the communist threat, swept away the doubts of avowed budget balancers like President Harry S. Truman and Secretary of Defense Louis A. Johnson, and created a fertile domestic environment for the administration’s “clearer-than-truth” rhetoric.⁶

Yet while these arguments crop up in almost every historical account, no one has undertaken a systematic assessment of the Truman administration’s efforts to sell NSC-68. Indeed, references to the government’s publicity campaign are generally confined to the preliminary discussions that occurred during the spring of 1950, just before and after the completion of NSC-68, and tend not to explore the evolution of official thinking beyond this point. Nor have historians fully assessed the extent to which private recommendations were translated into public output, let alone how PR officials responded to the vicissitudes of congressional and mass opinion as the Korean War ebbed and flowed along the Korean peninsula. As this essay seeks to demonstrate, a more comprehensive understanding of the

intricacies of these information efforts reveals that the government was not always in the vanguard of the political debate on mobilization, scaring the public into supporting its goals with overheated rhetoric. Nor did Korea have an altogether uncomplicated effect on the whole selling process. By using oft-neglected sources, such as those from the State Department's Office of Public Affairs (PA), Policy Planning Staff (PPS), and Congressional Liaison Office, this article aims to develop a fuller understanding of how the administration sought to spark and sustain domestic support for this pivotal policy shift, as well as shedding additional light on how the Truman administration conceived its domestic environment.⁷ Finally, although much excellent work has recently been done on how the State and Defense bureaucracies attempted to manage public opinion and develop the Cold War consensus, this has often covered a fairly broad time frame and has generally focused on the work of "state-private networks," particularly the roles played by mediating institutions like the media and pressure groups.⁸ By placing the spotlight on one narrower but still highly significant episode, this article aims to explore the publicity dimensions that have sometimes been neglected, particularly the more direct efforts made by officials, their rhetoric, their press conference statements, and their interaction with key figures in Congress.⁹

The first discussions over how best to sell NSC-68 took place during February and March 1950 whilst the document was still being drafted by the special interdepartmental study group, led by Paul H. Nitze of the PPS and containing representatives from the Defense Secretary's office and the Joint Strategic Survey Committee. For those officials and outside experts who were drawn into these consultations, three assumptions underpinned their calculations: the need to begin an information campaign as soon as possible; the likelihood that this campaign would have to be characterized by some form of overheated rhetoric; and a growing anxiety that any such effort to accentuate the danger could easily backfire,

particularly by sparking domestic pressure for a dangerous escalation of the Cold War. It was the interplay of these three factors, rather than a simple desire to launch a “psychological scare campaign,” which influenced the initial efforts to lay the groundwork for NSC-68 during the spring and summer, in the months before the document was officially endorsed by the president.

In the first place, going public in the near future was clearly necessary because of the dynamics of congressional politics. Although the Democrats held nominal majorities in both Houses during the 81st Congress, and although some influential voices such as Carl Vinson (D-GA), the chairman of House Armed Services Committee, and George H. Mahon (D-TX), the chairman of Armed Services Subcommittee of the House Appropriations Committee, fretted that America’s military capabilities were inadequate to deal with the mounting Soviet threat, most legislators were clearly in a stingy mood, and it escaped no one’s attention in January when Truman’s state of the union address was met with noisy approval from both sides of the aisle as soon as he proposed that “federal expenditures be held to the lowest levels.”¹⁰ Trying to persuade such a body of the need for a large defense hike would be difficult on any occasion, but time was also of the essence. As senior officials realized, the electoral cycle meant that “if any broad policies were to be agreed and carried into effect and if ... they involved congressional action,” they would have to be presented to Congress before the summer of 1951. “After that it would be impossible to deal with major issues until 1953.”¹¹ Given that urgency was at the very heart of NSC-68—for its drafters envisaged that 1954 would be the year of “maximum danger,” when the Soviets would have sufficient atomic bombs and aircraft to threaten the United States. with extensive damage—the document’s advocates were naturally anxious to begin paving the way for its ultimate acceptance as soon as possible.¹²

Moving fast was also important because the current domestic mood was tense and uneasy. Indeed, during February and March, the “loss” of China, the Soviet A-bomb test, and the administration’s decision to build the H-bomb—the very developments that had

prompted Truman to ask for a national-security review in the first place—also sparked a frenzied debate on the home front. To NSC-68 advocates, one of the most alarming features of this debate was the prospect that the public might be willing to support some form of appeasement initiative. In February and March, State Department officials were certainly worried that Americans might easily misjudge a series of proposals emanating from the Senate, especially Brien McMahon’s (D-CT) widely discussed call for “a moral crusade for peace” unveiled on 2 February, together with a resolution that Millard E. Tydings (D-MD) introduced four days later pressing for an international disarmament conference. Both suggestions were clearly intended as foreign propaganda initiatives. Indeed, McMahon hoped that his “attention-arresting” idea of diverting two-thirds of current U.S. arms spending into a global Marshall Plan in return for an effective atomic control agreement would help counter Soviet propaganda and enable the United States to recruit new allies throughout Europe and Asia.¹³ Yet the State Department fretted that a complacent public, which had “a false sense of security,” might take such proposals seriously. The prospect of mounting popular demands for some form of negotiation with the Soviets was certainly no chimera at a time when opinion polls revealed that 68 percent of the public now believed the United States should work out some form of agreement with the USSR on atomic control. Both McMahon and Tydings also faced tough reelection fights later in the year, and their sudden call for bold initiatives appeared to confirm that the underlying popular mood favored a “new approach” to the Cold War.¹⁴ Equally germane, in Congress itself both senators held influential positions, as chairmen of the Joint Committee on Atomic Energy and Armed Services Committee respectively. Their ideas also swiftly attracted a good deal of support from an unusual bipartisan coalition of legislators, including Republican nationalists like Forrest C. Donnell (MO), moderates like Alexander Wiley (WI), the second ranking Republican on the Senate Foreign Committee, and liberal Democrats such as Herbert H. Lehman (NY) and Paul H. Douglas (IL).¹⁵

While the possible fallout from the McMahon and Tydings initiatives particularly troubled Acheson, officials in the State Department's PA focused on a deeper set of problems. These stemmed from a basic conviction that a sustained military buildup ran against the grain of what Americans had traditionally been prepared to accept. For those responsible for drafting NSC-68, there was little doubt that the Cold War environment was so dangerous that a rapid rearmament program offered the only way to deter Soviet aggression. The threat was so great, NSC-68 concluded, that "budgetary considerations will need to be subordinated to the stark fact that our very independence as a nation may be at stake." Although the document itself was silent on exact figures, preliminary discussions by the study group suggested that the defense budget would have to be increased from \$13 billion to something in the region of \$35-50 billion per year, with some estimates soon proposing figures in the range of \$2.5 billion a year for military assistance to European allies, as much as \$3.6 billion by 1954 for civil defense, and \$155 million a year for foreign propaganda.¹⁶ Yet, as Barrett pointed out, selling such initiatives would be exceedingly difficult, because "we are going to run into vast opposition among informed people to a huge arms race. We will be warned that we are heading toward a 'garrison state.' Moreover, even if we should sell the idea, I fear that the U.S. public would rapidly tire of such an effort."¹⁷

When lumped together, these concerns about electoral cycles, congressional politics, and the inherent difficulty of generating mass support all pointed in one direction: an immediate and intensive education campaign aimed both at awakening the public to the gravity of the threat and convincing everyone that the United States had a constructive approach to deal with the dangerous new world. Officials in the PA were particularly explicit on how this ought to evolve, envisaging a two-stage process that would begin by building up a full public awareness of the problem, before moving onto an articulation of the specific steps contained in the government's program. In at least one of these stages, they suggested, it might well be necessary to "whip up sentiment."¹⁸

To some extent, Acheson agreed. The secretary of state certainly thought that some of these suggestions ought to be acted upon straight away, and between February and April he took to the stump to deliver a series of speeches that, according to close observers, were “drafted with extreme care and the localities in which they were delivered were chosen with equal deliberation.” Clearly aimed at puncturing any budding support for the McMahon and Tydings proposals, these utilized the language being developed in NSC-68 to drive home the nature of the threat, depicting the Soviet enemy as an expansionist imperialist state that relied on “threats, infiltration, planned chaos, despair, and confusion.” “There has never, in the history of the world, been an imperialist system that compares with what the Soviet Union has at its disposal,” Acheson declared, in a typical comment. In dealing with such a menace, he emphasized, America’s “basic policy” was “to create situations of strength.”¹⁹ But would such declarations be sufficient? In one conversation with Representative Christian Herter (R-MA) toward the end of March, Acheson even mooted the possibility of going well beyond this, perhaps by exploiting the next international incident that the communists seemed likely to spark in, say, Berlin, Austria, or Formosa in order to raise the public temperature. As Herter recorded, “how to awaken the American people to the seriousness of the situation was something that troubled him greatly. However, in this respect, he felt that, as had happened before, Joe Stalin might well lend a helping hand. In fact, he thought that a number of crises of greater or lesser seriousness might well develop in the near future.”²⁰

Yet, even in the first months of 1950, this was only one aspect of the State Department’s thinking. Indeed, what historians have tended to miss by stressing the Truman administration’s “alarmist, hyperbolic, anticommunist rhetoric” is that all this talk of “whipping up sentiment” was counterbalanced by a very real fear that the popular mood could easily overheat, thereby reducing officials’ freedom to maneuver and perhaps even pushing them toward excessively radical and dangerous policies. Likewise, any effort to drive home the import of external incidents had to recognize the chilling fact that only a

very thin line separated a public aroused enough by a small international incident to support a large defense buildup, from a populace so panicked by external developments that it might demand a far more dangerous course of action. Because of these concerns, much of the talk about “psychological scare campaigns” or exploiting crises often remained just that: talk. In fact, when it came to concrete actions, during the spring and summer of 1950 even advocates of NSC-68, for all their private emphasis on the need for haste, frequently acted with caution and restraint.

The underlying reason for this caution was simple. Inside the foreign policy establishment there was a widely held conviction that the popular mood was basically unstable, too prone to volatile oscillations between complacency and hysteria, withdrawal and engagement. This, at least, appeared to be the lesson taught by the American experience in both world wars, when the public had initially been reluctant to get involved in the fighting, but once roused had been determined to crush the enemy, only to descend swiftly back into its old lethargy as soon as the fighting was over.²¹ It was also the common conclusion of a recent bout of highly influential social-science literature, as academics like Thomas A. Bailey, Martin Kriesberg, and Gabriel A. Almond exploited the growing volume of polling data to try to ascertain the basic nature of American opinion. By 1950, their central conclusion had been fully digested by officials in the State Department’s PA, and it gave intellectual credence to the notion that that the popular mood was highly unstable, often characterized by “sudden shifts of interest or preference.” As Almond succinctly put it, “the superficiality and instability of public attitudes toward foreign affairs creates the danger of under- and overreaction to changes in the world political situation.”²²

Because the popular mood was highly susceptible to such violent mood swings, leaders had tread carefully, tailoring their message to suit current conditions. On occasion, this might well entail overselling, perhaps even exaggerating the importance of an international incident, in order to jolt the populace out of its torpor. But at the same time, clear dangers lurked in going too far in this direction, for such activity might also create an

overreaction, perhaps even sparking a widespread popular hysteria. As a result, the goal of any information campaign was to generate interest in times of apathy, but without creating a panic when the mood swiftly began to shift.

In the spring of 1950, with NSC-68 nearly complete, the likelihood that the public would oscillate between complacency and hysteria was not merely an abstract concern. As PA reported to senior officials, recent Cold War developments, culminating with Truman's decision to build the H-bomb, had led to the public airing of a variety of conflicting proposals, not just calls for an immediate disarmament conference but also pressure for a preventive strike against the USSR.²³ Because NSC-68 itself had so cursorily rejected ideas like appeasement and preventive war, some historians have argued that their inclusion was simply a classic bureaucratic ploy. By setting up such "straw options," they contend, the drafters' goal was to make their recommendation of a large defense buildup more palatable to economizers like Truman and Johnson.²⁴ Yet such an interpretation neglects the administration's perception of the specific domestic environment during February and March. Indeed when viewed in this light, it becomes clear that, far from being "straw options," the alternatives discussed in NSC-68 actually symbolized the extremes that the American public might be tempted to adopt as it oscillated back and forth between what one media commentator termed "atomic apathy and hydrogen hysteria."²⁵ More to the point, they were the extremes that any PR effort to sell NSC-68 would have to meet head on.

That support for a preventive war was suddenly mounting first became clear during January and February, in the midst of the Hiss trial, McCarthy's initial claims that the State Department was infested with communists, and above all the heightened sense of vulnerability that followed Truman's H-bomb decision. On one occasion in January, Acheson was even forced to listen to a group of senators who claimed that their constituents were frequently writing in "with statements like 'why don't we get into this thing now and get it over with before the time is too late.'" This "attitude was growing by

leaps and bounds in his state,” one legislator stressed, “and ... he was compelled to take note of it.”²⁶ A few weeks later, *Newsweek* added to the growing sense of alarm, when it ominously recorded that, “for the first time, some members of Congress were beginning to speculate on what had formerly been an almost forbidden subject—preventive war,” with Representative Henry (“Scoop”) Jackson (D-WA) even using veiled language to bring “the subject out of the cloakroom and onto the floor of the House.”²⁷ Although there was no hard polling data on this subject, during the early spring the word from Capitol Hill was that the popular mood remained ominously militant. “May I say that talks with a number of congressmen in the last few days, who have told me about their mail,” Barrett told senior State Department officials on 6 March, “underscores my belief that there is increasing public pressure, which could become dangerous, for some sort of bold action.”²⁸

This notion that pressure for bold action might be dangerous rather than helpful underpinned State Department discussions during the late spring, as officials gathered to discuss the possible implementation of NSC-68. Although the document itself had tersely and dismissively rejected the whole concept of a preventive strike, it had alluded to the possibility of the Soviet Union becoming strong enough to risk war with the United States by 1954. Because of this, there was much debate over whether the purpose of U.S. policy was to mobilize in readiness for such a war in four years time or “to prepare for something less.” The fragile consensus that emerged was that NSC-68 “did not call for complete preparation for war, but primarily for a posture of defense sufficient to enable the United States to deter a Soviet attack, and to achieve U.S. objectives short of war.”

Given the unstable nature of the American popular mood, however, together with recent hints that preventive war might become popular, such a fine distinction could easily be lost on the U.S. public. As Adrian Fisher, the State Department’s legal advisor, pointed out in a meeting on 6 June, “by indicating the necessity of building up forces you automatically create a frame of mind which considers that war is immediate and this in turn makes it impossible to achieve our objective which is preventing war.” James E. Webb, the

number two man in the Department, fully agreed “that this sort of thing must be headed off—that it required firm leadership to sort out the things which are important to be done.” It was particularly essential to reject proposals from the National Security Resources Board (NSRB), which focused on civilian defense measures to be adopted *after* a war had started, because if the assumption took hold that “we are fighting a war tomorrow,” then “the inevitable result will be to make this assumption come true.”²⁹

At the very top of the State Department, there was a real determination to stop this type of thinking from taking a firm root. In public, Acheson continued to use the stark and vivid language of NSC-68 to convince Americans of the gravity of the Soviet threat, stressing in his most high-profile speech of this period that “we are faced with a threat not only to our civilization in which we live but to the whole physical environment in which that civilization can exist.”³⁰ But at the same time, the secretary of state and his senior aides also went out of their way to warn the public that “by thinking that war is inevitable ... we will make it so.” What was required, Acheson stressed, was not scare tactics, but efforts to appeal to “coolness” and “steady nerves.” “Restraint and self-discipline,” the secretary of state emphasized time and again, “can help us to avoid some of the dangers which lie along our course... If we keep before us that our purpose in building military power is to enable us to settle our differences by peaceful means, then we shall avoid the terrible error of talking and acting as though the end of our effort is war. The purpose of our effort is the exact opposite. But foolish talk about preventive war, or the inevitability of war, will help to make war inevitable. It does not need to be so at all.”³¹

Thus, to advocates of NSC-68, an effective PR campaign required traversing a tricky line between driving home the nature of threat without panicking the public to such an extent that it might demand excessively aggressive action. Striking such balance would have been difficult at the best of times, but between April and June the problem was compounded by one obvious obstacle: the lack of a bureaucratic consensus. Before NSC-68 had been completed, State Department officials had often worried that other powerful

administration players were effectively undermining public support for their policy of building up American strength. Under the influence of Louis Johnson, the Pentagon seemed especially reluctant to abandon its public focus on “cutting the fat” from the defense budget, and between January and March senior military officials, whatever their private views, continued to testify before Congress on the need for fiscal restraint. “The eventual strength of our country depends on upon its industrial capacity,” Omar Bradley, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs, stressed on 15 March. “We must not destroy that by spending too much from year to year.”³² The president wholeheartedly agreed. Having campaigned in 1948 on the basis that the economy could not sustain military expenditures in excess of \$15 billion, Truman remained wedded to capping the current defense budget to around \$13 billion, telling reporters on 2 March that, despite this ceiling, “the national defense situation is in better shape than it has ever been in times when we are not at war.”³³

By the end of March, with NSC-68 near completion, State Department officials who were heavily involved in the drafting of NSC-68 believed the time was ripe to try to undo the damage of the president’s “previous optimistic statements,” which not only obviously contradicted the notion of enhancing America’s military strength but also seemed likely to fuel complacency and the pressure for negotiation. Perhaps, PPS planners even hoped, as soon as NSC-68 received presidential sanction, Truman might be encouraged to make a speech, stressing that his recent failure to drum home the extent of the danger posed by the Soviets was merely a tactical decision “to avoid any word or action which would cause undue alarm” before the policy review had been completed.³⁴

Yet this suggestion clearly fell on deaf ears, for in April and May the White House remained firmly reluctant to echo the more doom-laden components of the State Department line. After receiving NSC-68 on 7 April, Truman’s instinct was to play for time, directing that absolutely “no publicity be given this report or its contents” while he consulted with more fiscally conservative officials about the document’s conclusions. The next day, a U.S. plane was shot down by the Soviets in the Baltic. At first glance, this was

just the type of incident that Acheson had hoped for a few weeks earlier, when he had mooted the possibility of exploiting a crisis to drum up support for a defense buildup. The mood on Capitol Hill certainly changed swiftly. As Congressman Mahon now reported to the Pentagon, “the present temper of the House” was suddenly in favor of a defense hike in the region of \$500 million.³⁵ Yet, although Louis Johnson moved to satisfy this demand by acceding to a compromise budget increase of \$300 million, from the president’s perspective obvious dangers lurked in using this moment to ratchet up the rhetoric, especially since Tydings had just made another high-profile public intervention, this time suggesting World War III could “accidentally” start at any time. When asked to comment on Tydings’s prediction at a press conference, Truman was certainly anxious to be calm, rather than scare, his audience. “The senator is unduly alarmed,” the president stressed “... I think the situation now is not nearly so bad as it was in the first half of 1946. Maybe I am an optimist, but I have to be, to be President of the United States.”³⁶

In a limited sense, such a statement did not stray too far from the State Department’s desire to warn against the inevitability of war. But Truman’s positive comparison with the Cold War of 1946 was clearly too much for those officials in the PPS who were already troubled by the president’s persistent overconfidence. Small wonder, then, that well-connected journalists were soon being fed reports echoing the key conclusions of NSC-68 and explicitly challenging Truman’s upbeat assessments. The prevailing view in Washington, Ernest K. Lindley reported on 15 May, is that the rate of Soviet rearmament suggests that by 1952, 1953, or 1954, the Kremlin may be ready for war. “The threat can be met only by a greater effort than we have yet made,” Lindley concluded, but “the American people cannot be expected to rise to the need unless the president and other officials see what is needed and tell them.”³⁷

Truman generally shied away from such a challenge, however. For one thing, during May he pointedly refused to publicly backtrack from his earlier statements that “the defense budget next year will be smaller than it is this year, and we are continually cutting

it by economies.” For another, he also continued to place his emphasis principally on the need for calmness. “We must not become hysterical,” the president told Congress on 10 June. “Our situation is strong, our strength is growing. We must remain cool, determined, and steady.”³⁸

Significantly, the outbreak of the Korean War on 24-25 June only served to enhance this determination to present a cool public façade. In private, to be sure, Korea suddenly transformed the policymaking landscape, pushing even committed economizers like Truman and Johnson in the direction of an expanded military mobilization. In public, too, the Pentagon now suddenly had a very real incentive to identify itself with a large arms buildup. This was particularly true for Louis Johnson, who was already under relentless attack from the Alsop brothers on the grounds that his misguided notions of economy had left the United States military dangerously exposed at a time of heightened peril.³⁹ Now, as U.S. forces in Korea were forced back in a series of month-long retreats, America’s patent lack of preparedness became a dominant political issue. It was given added force by the absence of direct censorship in the Korean theater, which enabled war correspondents to inform readers back home of the severe equipment shortages. The State Department was perfectly happy with this lack of censorship, believing that “the real impact of the Korean situation should be permitted to fall upon the American people to alert them to the seriousness of the situation.”⁴⁰ Johnson was less than enthusiastic, however, for he quickly became the central scapegoat in the preparedness debate, with even some Democrats attacking his “penny-pinching methods” and calling for his resignation. But Johnson was unwilling to force MacArthur to clamp down on war correspondents. Instead, he shrewdly tried to take cover behind NSC-68, telling a House Armed Forces subcommittee on 25 July that back in April he had in fact informed them that a major national security review had just recommended a significant increase in the defense budget.⁴¹

Letting the public—and the Pentagon—experience the full force of the Korean defeats therefore served an obvious purpose. But even for many officials in the State

Department, this did not mean that the administration ought to accompany the unfolding events with aggressive, “clearer-than-truth” rhetoric, in order to drive home the need for mobilization. Quite the contrary: in the wake of the Korean crisis, even NSC-68 advocates firmly believed that such behavior would be far too dangerous. For one thing, many worried that any overt taunting of Stalin might provoke the Soviets into another act of aggression. For another, excessive utterances might simply engender a popular panic, fuelling demands for radical and bold action against the USSR now. “We must exercise a high degree of self-discipline under the present situation,” one State Department official therefore remarked to a friendly congressman on 6 July, “and should carefully consider any measures likely to cause hysteria.” “This is a situation where it is very important not to have our words run ahead of what we do,” Acheson reiterated to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee a couple of weeks later. “If you talk a lot bigger than what you are going to do, you may get some trouble. This is a very touchy situation.”⁴²

This determination to adopt a subdued public posture in the opening stages of the Korean War manifested itself in a variety of ways, each of which precluded any serious attempt to lay the foundations for public support of NSC-68. In the first place, there was to be no concerted and coordinated campaign to publicize U.S. policy. Indeed, Truman was reluctant to take to the airwaves at all in the first few weeks of the crisis, and was particularly opposed making a personal appearance before Congress lest this contribute to a “war psychosis.” The president also tried to keep a lid on the public appearances made by Johnson and other leading figures in the Pentagon, while Acheson was told to ration his public appearances, particularly avoiding any speaking engagements that were blatantly party political in nature.⁴³

As well as muzzling subordinates, the president also took enormous care over the few comments that the administration did release to the public. Back in the spring, Acheson had made a few speeches in which he had lifted phrases directly from NSC-68, depicting the communist world as a monolithic bloc in which the Kremlin called all the shots. After

the start of the Korean War, however, official pronouncements were suddenly “calm and factual” in tone, with every effort made to avoid connecting the USSR directly with the North Korean attack.⁴⁴ Thus, the president’s press statements conspicuously dropped the phrase “centrally directed communist imperialism.” And any official who broke ranks from this line was now swiftly reigned in and disciplined—as Edward Barrett found out to his cost. At the very start of the crisis, Barrett unguardedly told a reporter that the North Koreans had no autonomy and were utterly dependent on Moscow; their relationship, in his vivid phrase, was like that between “Walt Disney and Donald Duck.” Very quickly, however, Barrett received an urgent telegram from his superiors. “Pipe down,” came the terse instruction.⁴⁵

Nor was there any great effort to publicize the central recommendations of NSC-68. Acheson’s recent statements “in which he repeatedly called for strengthening the defense of the United States and other free nations against communism” were collected together as a way of “setting the record straight.” But there was to be no public revelation of the need to launch a massive defense program “with the utmost speed,” no hint that the effort would have to be sustained over a period of four or more years, and no indication of the likely overall size of the ultimate program. When the State Department did circulate an Information Guidance sheet to officials, all it contained was vague platitudes about the free world having “both the resources and the will effectively to resist the act and threat of aggression.” It was hardly stirring or radical stuff.⁴⁶

The one possible exception to all this was the president’s package for waging the Korean War that was discussed and finalized during the first weeks of July. In private, Truman now agreed with Acheson that we “must ask for money, and if it is a question of asking for too little or too much, ... [we] should ask for too much.” But he also remained cautious. Indeed, rather than using this as an obvious first step in the direction of massive mobilization, Truman’s attention was fixed firmly on Korea, where MacArthur’s request for eight divisions threatened to place an unbearable strain on the current ten-division

army.⁴⁷ But though he recognized the obvious need to increase troop levels both to fight in Korea and to maintain a viable reserve in the United States, the president nevertheless wanted to avoid “putting any more money than necessary in the hands of the military.” He also rejected the demands of those in NSRB for more sweeping and mandatory controls, believing that this current limited war “might fit into an expanding economy in which a judicious application of fiscal and monetary policy would contain inflationary pressures.”⁴⁸

Truman unveiled this package to the public on 19 July, in a speech delivered to a radio and television audience that was estimated at around 130 million. Placing the Korean conflict in a global context, the president explained that the communist invasion was likely to be only the first in a series of “sneak” attacks. But apart from a few generalities about the “need to build up our own Army, Navy, and Air Force over and above what is needed in Korea,” he refused to issue any concrete hints that a large and sustained defense buildup over the next four years was in the offing. And even his request for \$10 billion in supplemental appropriations was basically a “stopgap measure,” formulated in response to the Korean emergency rather than being related to “larger national security considerations.”⁴⁹

Above all, officials remained determined to avoid any word or deed that might create the impression America was being placed on a war footing. This became clear when John Foster Dulles, the administration’s token bipartisan representative, proposed making a speech to ratchet up support for a larger and more sustained preparedness program. Swiftly and firmly disabusing him of the whole idea, Barrett stressed that “the mobilization for which he [the president] is asking is for the purpose of replacing the wastage in Korea and generally improving the defense of the United States. It does not constitute full war mobilization. He therefore feels that in the passage cited it would be desirable not to relate the measures now being taken to the expectation of general war.”⁵⁰

That the administration’s main bipartisan representative wanted to present a more vigorous front to the public should have acted as an early-warning signal to senior officials,

since it pointed to an obvious vulnerability that the Republican party could exploit as it geared up for the 1950 midterm elections. Of course, by this stage the GOP was already looking for any stick with which to beat the administration, its leaders convinced both that the “me-too” strategy pursued by Thomas E. Dewey and Arthur Vandenberg had led to the electoral defeat in 1948 and that Truman’s and Acheson’s abject neglect of Asia was responsible for the current mess in Korea.⁵¹ But had the administration adopted a more dynamic and forceful information campaign at the very start of this crisis, drawing the battle lines starkly, indicting the Soviet Union, and placing Korea squarely in the context of the opening round of World War III, then this would have made it far more difficult for the GOP to oppose the government. Indeed, the public pressure would have been much greater for everyone to forget past differences and focus on the global struggle ahead. The parameters of political debate would have thus been narrowed, the possibilities of dissent curtailed.⁵² As it was, even in the current “police action” GOP leaders initially moved somewhat cautiously, with diehard opponents like Robert A. Taft (R-OH) going out of their way to stress that “Republicans should give every possible support to the conduct of the war.”⁵³ Yet, at the same time, the GOP leadership also glimpsed an obvious opening to go on the offensive. Simply put, a limited conflict gave them the scope to offer the government only limited support. After all, there had been no declaration of war, no calls for total preparedness; there had not even been any fierce fire-eating language coming from the White House, compelling everyone toward unity at a moment of dire peril.⁵⁴

That the GOP now had a perfect opportunity to go on the offensive was further underscored by a series of polls and surveys, which seemed to demonstrate that the administration’s actions and utterances lagged considerably behind popular opinion. “The main criticism of the administration’s actions since 25 June,” noted one report in August, “is that the actions are inadequate and that mobilization should be faster and greater in magnitude.” According to Gallup, 70 percent of Americans would even endorse higher taxes to fund a larger military. “Rarely has the Institute in its fifteen years of measuring

public opinion,” Gallup concluded, “found such heavy majorities expressing a willingness to pay more taxes for any public purpose.”⁵⁵

In Congress, many legislators were quick to line up behind such a popular cause. Even before Truman unveiled his own package, there had been demands from leaders of both parties “for round-the-clock armaments production and full mobilization on the home front.” As the debate got underway, there was little opposition to the president’s request for more than \$10 billion in supplemental appropriations for the military. But Congress soon heard from respected and influential figures like Bernard Baruch, who advocated total and immediate economic mobilization, while Robert P. Patterson, an instrumental figure in the rearmament program during World War II, called for up to a quarter of the nation’s resources to be diverted toward defense. For the GOP leadership, this was a tricky issue, because Taft and his conservative followers believed that a wide-ranging mobilization would be tantamount to giving Truman “arbitrary and dictatorial control over the entire economy.”⁵⁶ But the Taft wing quickly found it difficult to hold the party to this line, and by 31 July fifteen internationalist House Republicans (including Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford) had issued a statement declaring that Korea “has exposed the fact that a tragic diplomatic and military inadequacy exists” and calling for “complete mobilization.” The very next day, Congress as a whole seemed ready to follow their lead. “Sentiment for all-out mobilization [is] sweeping through both houses of Congress,” one close observer noted. “Administration forces virtually conceded that the president’s limited program would be expanded.”⁵⁷

With the administration working hard to try to regain a measure of control over Congress, the main tangible result of this spasm on the Hill was a section in the final Defense Production Act that gave Truman the power to institute standby economic controls—something the administration did not deem necessary.⁵⁸ But at the same time, all this obvious evidence that the government’s stance lagged behind the popular mood also emboldened the Republican attacks and enabled leading spokesmen to turn mobilization

into a key issue in the upcoming midterm campaign. The president “has been negligent in leaving the American people in the dark about the gravity” of the international situation, Senator George D. Aiken (R-VT) charged in August, and has only refrained from asking for greater controls “for political reasons.” “Can we wait until after the November elections to tell the people the real truth,” agreed Senator Edward Martin (R-PA), complete mobilization was essential now. Coming from Republicans not always in the front rank of the diehard opposition, such statements were disturbing enough. But they soon paled next to the publication of the Republican White Paper, which the GOP members on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee produced after close consultation with their colleagues. Released on 13 August, this charged Truman and Acheson with being blind to the “true aims and methods of the rulers of Soviet Russia,” constantly underestimating the dangers of Asian communism, and failing “vigorously to build strong American armed forces.” “These are the facts which must be faced,” the White Paper concluded. “The American people will not now excuse those responsible for these blunders.”⁵⁹

This highly partisan assault deeply alarmed many in the administration. “It is not ordinarily within the province of this staff to recommend approaches to be taken in domestic political problems,” Nitze wrote Webb on 14 August, “yet the grave implications of the [GOP] statement as it affects the future conduct of U.S. policy, particularly the far-reaching program envisaged in NSC-68, cannot be overlooked.” After all, NSC-68 clearly assumed the maintenance of “national solidarity in support of the major undertakings in American foreign policy and security.”⁶⁰ The Republicans, however, seemed to be more bent on attacking the administration at each and every opportunity. But what could be done? Nitze himself recommended that the administration ignore the GOP attack, because a forceful rebuttal would merely do further “injury to the bipartisan principle in the critical months ahead.” Others agreed. At a strategy lunch on 15 August, officials from the White House, State Department, and Pentagon recommended that Truman adopt an air of studied aloofness. “It was decided that the president’s statement should be very brief,” one of them

recorded. “He should attempt to minimize the statement by the Republican minority and should do nothing which would be viewed as an effort to break up the bipartisan policy.”⁶¹

Yet such official reticence only served to reinforce the growing impression that the administration’s whole Cold War strategy was distinctly lackluster. Indeed, from the perspective of the White House and State Department, there may have been good grounds for refusing to engage in public polemics, from concerns that a forceful rebuttal would further undermine bipartisanship to fears that a more vigorous and stark presentation of the danger would precipitate demands for more radical action. But by August it was clear that this low-key posture had not worked. For one thing, it had provided Republicans with the perfect opening to outflank the administration by claiming that they were the party that espoused timely and vigorous—not laggardly and complacent—Cold War policies. For another, it was also starting to exacerbate the very ills that officials were trying to avoid.

This became abundantly clear on the subject of preventive war. Far from dampening down demands for bold action, during the summer the government’s subdued PR efforts were actually starting to fuel them. Thus, in the middle of August a delegation of leading internationalist legislators from both parties descended on the State Department. Believing that the administration’s public statements had patently failed to bring “a new measure of hope to the American people,” they warned of “a growing disposition on the part of the American people to support the concept of preventive war. This growing attitude is aired in fear,” they stressed, “and will continue to grow in volume unless some bold alternative course of action is presented by the government.”⁶² This insight soon proved correct. In private, John M. Vorys (R-OH), the ranking Republican on the House Foreign Affairs Committee, now told the State Department that “war with the Soviet Union is inevitable. Perhaps our thinking should now concentrate not on how to avoid it but how best to win it.”⁶³ On the radio, Harold Stassen was more specific, declaring that another communist assault anywhere in the world ought to mean that “war will come to Moscow, to the Urals, to the Ukraine.” Congress itself had to “take the leadership and issue this

warning,” added Stassen, a likely contender for the GOP’s 1952 presidential nomination, “because the Truman administration had been almost unbelievably confused and inefficient.”⁶⁴

In this environment, about the last thing the State Department wanted was any official encouragement of the notion that war was inevitable or that the United States should seek to provoke a showdown in the near future. Unfortunately, however, officials in Foggy Bottom had very little control over the actions of the central policymaker in the Pentagon. Indeed, by the summer the State and Defense Departments were themselves like two warring powers. Relations between Acheson and Johnson had completely broken down, and, despite a few forlorn attempts to build bridges, State Department officials were often forced to rely on scraps of information, sometimes even hearsay and gossip, to discern what the secretary of defense was up to. Piecing this together, it soon became clear that Johnson was grasping every opportunity—in private, off-the-record comments to journalists and legislators—not just to shift the blame for America’s poor showing in Korea by badmouthing Acheson but also by suggesting that the ultimate adoption of NSC-68 might actually push America in a dangerous and belligerent direction. “He said there is a surprising amount of sentiment within the services and from intelligent persons outside for the United States to ‘make’ an incident in Europe and start soon with our atomic bombs,” the *New York Times*’s Arthur Krock privately noted after one meeting with the secretary of defense. “He told us very plainly that we have plenty of bombs close at hand and there is no question that we can fly big bombers from U.S. bases and return.” “A lot of people now feel that war is inevitable,” Johnson told an executive session of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in the middle of August. If the country continued to move in the direction of high defense spending and a large military establishment, “there will be a lot of pressure to use our strength.” In contemplating this, an aide reported back to Harriman, Johnson’s inference “appeared to be that he personally believed both that war was

inevitable and that, at the end of three years, we might have to engage in a preventive war.”⁶⁵

On 25 August, Johnson’s sentiments came fully to the surface, when Francis P. Matthews, the U.S. secretary of the navy, publicly declared that America had to be prepared to launch a preventive war. Although there was no direct evidence linking Johnson to this speech, word in press circles and the Washington cocktail circuit was that “Matthews’s speech was, of course, inspired by Johnson.”⁶⁶ Coming on the same day that MacArthur released his famous letter on Taiwan to the Veterans of Foreign Wars, Matthews’s speech vividly confirmed to officials in the White House and State Department that the administration’s current public posture was now having perilous consequences. After all, far from fostering bipartisanship, it had provided Republicans with both an opportunity and motive to take the offensive. Far from dampening down demands for radical measures, notions like preventive war were now being discussed more widely. And, not least, all the controversy surrounding Johnson and Matthews was creating an image of policy confusion, even incompetence. Four years before, a very public dispute over foreign policy between two leading officials, Henry A. Wallace and James F. Byrnes, had foreshadowed a disastrous defeat for the Democrats in the 1946 midterm elections. Now, countless journalists hastened to emphasize the obvious parallel, while Taft, never one to let a good opportunity pass by, charged that the administration “has so many conflicts within itself, it’s like a man with no brains who is unable to develop a consistent course of action.”⁶⁷

Deeply worried by such criticisms, at the start of September Truman made a series of efforts to try to gain control over the public debate. For one thing, he moved to replace Johnson with General George C. Marshall, a man with vast experience in the problems of mobilization, and someone who had already developed a close working relationship with Acheson. For another, Truman also made two fireside chats in the space of just over a week in an attempt to clarify U.S. policy. In these, he vigorously denied that America sought a preventive war, and also stressed the need to “direct a large share” of America’s

“productive power to defense purposes.” Yet, even now, the president’s overall tone was still subdued—more a detailed statement intended to undo all the confusion of recent weeks, than a rousing call to arms. Indeed, as one White House told a reporter, both speeches were very much part of the president’s “timetable of gradually rousing the people to the peril they face, rather than scaring the daylights out of them all at once, as some administration advisers have urged.”⁶⁸

In fact, it was not until the end of September that the administration’s basic PR stance changed perceptibly. The central reason for this was simple. If the Korean invasion and the defeats of July and August had sparked very real fears that the public was prone to hysteria, then the sweeping victories after Inchon provoked a new set of concerns that the mood might descend back into lethargy and apathy. Significantly, this new worry did not stem from the prevailing drift of current opinion polls, which even after Inchon showed little change in the numbers wanting America to play a vigorous role in world affairs. In fact, according to Gallup there remained a “great public willingness to support higher taxes and domestic controls,” while a NORC poll found that only 16 percent of Americans “thought too many sacrifices were being asked.”⁶⁹ Yet what troubled officials was not so much current opinion but lessons from the past, especially the widely held belief that Americans had always lapsed into complacency as soon as victory had been won on the battlefield. Indeed, on the basis of their reading of past precedent, numerous officials now fretted that Inchon would “lead to a let down in public support [for] our preparedness and collective security programs.” Or, as the new secretary of defense pithily put it, “Whenever you win a victory overseas, you get in trouble back here.”⁷⁰

Yet all this is not to say, as some have argued, that the prospect of a let down “encouraged” the administration to engage in a series of risky policies, from crossing the 38th parallel to ignoring warnings about a possible Chinese intervention, in the hope that a prolonged war might save the rearmament program.⁷¹ Quite apart from the lack of direct evidence linking the two policies, it was also the case that the PPS, the leading advocate of

NSC-68 in the State Department, was the most lukewarm to the idea of heading into North Korea, fearful that rollback might precipitate a Soviet or Chinese response and divide America's allies.⁷² More generally, rather than thinking in terms of manipulating external events for domestic mobilization purposes, the administration's basic reaction to the prospect of victory in Korea was to finally begin detailed planning for a sustained and intensive information campaign to sell NSC-68, with the timetable governed by the prospect not only that the war would soon be over but also that the 82^d Congress would assemble for the first time early in the New Year.

Paving the way, Commerce Secretary Charles Sawyer delivered the opening blast on 24 September, stressing that home front mobilization must continue even after victory in Korea. It would be "extremely naïve, even stupid," he warned, "to assume that, if this episode is closed in our favor, we can forget the whole thing." In the next few days, Marshall, Bradley, and Truman all followed suit. "We face a grueling period of hard work, self-denial, and danger," declared the new secretary of defense on 27 September. "I ask you to bear in mind that if the fighting in Korea should cease tomorrow, our increased responsibility would still be with us." "The greatest danger," stressed Bradley the same day, is that once the fighting is over "this nation will let down its guard."⁷³ With Truman endorsing Bradley in a press conference, at least one close observer believed that "these warnings are not independent, but are part of a consolidated White House plan." For the first time, there was certainly a clear determination to reveal more of the conclusions contained in NSC-68. As Marshall now told members of the Business Advisory Council, the country had to prepare for a production program of at least four years that might cost in the region of \$55 billion.⁷⁴

In stressing the importance of sustaining the effort after Inchon, the administration was helped by a number of developments during September and October. One was the tentative move toward a Western European defense arrangement that started to take shape, especially after Congress approved a \$4 billion supplemental appropriation for the Mutual

Defense Assistance Program (MDAP) on 27 September, prompting the State Department to move publicly to stress how important this program was to America's overall Cold War effort. In New York, Acheson and Marshall also met with their European counterparts to discuss ways of developing an integrated force. Although both men were privately troubled by the outcome of these talks, fretting that French opposition to German involvement might create domestic difficulties, particularly at a time when familiar voices like Herbert Hoover were already insisting that further aid to Western Europe be halted "until a definitely united and sufficient European army is in sight," in public the administration tried its best to gloss over these difficulties, and even after the talks ended with a lack of agreement at the end of October Marshall expressed confidence that French opposition would soon be overcome.⁷⁵

Meanwhile, another event also seemed likely to help prevent a "let down"—the publication of the NSRB's Blue Book on Civil Defense, which Stuart Symington, the NSRB head, hoped "will hit the American people with tremendous impact." Between 25 and 29 September, 1750 representatives from 20 states and 150 cities, towns, and counties then assembled in Chicago for a civil defense exercise. Although some outside observers were skeptical of the value of this gathering, commenting acerbically that officials "struggled against heavy odds to prevent the exercise becoming a Democratic party convention," while "some of the local politicians viewed the civil defense jobs as a means of settling a large proportion of the demands for patronage," both the Blue Book and the Chicago exercise nevertheless served to dramatize that the broader Cold War threat remained, despite the optimistic news from Korea.⁷⁶

Yet obvious problems still persisted. One was the State Department's fear that the president himself might be prone to a "let down" in the post-Inchon euphoria. At a key NSC meeting on 29 September, Truman's old hostility to a large buildup certainly seemed to come back to the fore, for he now stressed that NSC-68 programs "must be of a size to insure public support." No one was quite sure "whether this augured reductions." But in the Pentagon, the new team assembled by Marshall was soon expressing its determination to

base NSC-68 on secure long-term foundations rather than the “anxieties of the moment,” which in the current environment meant scaling down the total five-year estimate from \$260 billion to \$190.6 billion, while also cutting \$9 billion off another supplemental appropriations package planned for the current fiscal year. To Acheson, this was disturbing enough.⁷⁷ Then in mid-October, he also got wind of the fact that Truman intended to become an enthusiastic cheerleader for Senator McMahon’s disarmament plan in a speech the president planned to deliver before the United Nations at the end of the month. Swiftly intervening by raising “numerous and noisy objections,” Acheson finally persuaded the president to limit his discussion on disarmament to a few paragraphs, while “the McMahon idea that money saved from an armaments race could be spent on a super point four program was boiled down to a few skimpy sentences.” At a time when the State Department wanted to lay the groundwork for selling a large defense buildup, it was a narrow escape.⁷⁸

Another problem was Congress, particularly after the Republicans made substantial gains in November’s midterm elections. During the campaign, officials had been constantly worried that the opportunistic GOP was far too willing to exploit, and perhaps thereby exacerbate, the public’s general tendency to both under- and overreact to external events. Not only had leading Republican spokesmen called for bolder policies during the retreats and defeats of July and August but they had then moved to criticize the government’s efforts to prevent a “let down” during September and October, charging that the statements made by Sawyer, Bradley, and Truman simply confirmed “the distrust which the Truman administration leaders have of the people of this country.” Such distrust, they declared, lay behind the government’s efforts to “resort to stampeding tactics to whip up public support for its plans.” To make matters worse, some leading Republican spokesmen even seemed to be living proof of the unstable mood theory in action, with Harold Stassen clearly in the vanguard. In August, when the situation in Korea looked grim, Stassen had called on the United States to present the Soviets with an ultimatum. Then in October, as soon as events

in Korea improved, he had suddenly shifted ground by sending a letter to Stalin, suggesting that they meet to discuss how best to achieve world peace.⁷⁹

The election results themselves only seemed likely to complicate the task of selling NSC-68. Although the Democrats continued to hold nominal majorities in both houses, the State Department recognized that in practical terms the administration would now face a more hostile audience on the Hill. According to a PPS survey, when the 82^d Congress assembled in January, 24 senators would be outright supporters, 48 would be well disposed but selective in support, and 24 would be irreconcilables. In the House it would be even worse, with 50 members likely to be outright supporters, 130 generally well disposed but also “inclined to tight scrutiny of amounts of money,” another 130 highly selective in support, and 125 intransigent opponents. Equally troubling was the fact that the administration had lost some of its key allies in the Senate leadership, with Majority Leader Scott Lucas, Majority Whip Francis J. Myers, and Chairman of the Armed Service Committee Tydings all going down to defeat.⁸⁰

Such developments would clearly necessitate a charm offensive on the Hill, bringing in members from both sides of the aisle for consultations. Putting pressure on Congress would also entail a more intensive information campaign aimed at the mass public. After the key NSC meeting on 29 September, in which the president finally gave his formal endorsement to NSC-68, the State Department set about this task. Proud of his handiwork, Nitze wanted NSC-68 to be “made public with the minimum of necessary deletions and editing, rather than a popular rewrite which would necessarily talk down to the public.” “While public opinion may be uninformed on certain subjects, including some of the main considerations discussed in NSC-68,” Nitze stressed, “the American public has all the intelligence necessary to make the right decisions, provided all the considerations are put before it and opportunity is given for full debate.”⁸¹

PA’s response offered some interesting insights into its perception of the domestic audience. On the one hand, officials in the division agreed that the administration had to be

candid and upfront. “This is not a one shot affair like a particular bill to be put through Congress,” Schuyler Foster stressed. “It will last over five years and the information program will want to be designed with that fact in mind.” “It would make a very favorable impression on the American public,” a memorandum drafted by PA therefore concluded, “if the presentation of this program were regarded as an effort by the government to state all of the facts. The American people should not only ‘know what the score is’ but should *feel* that they know what the score is. This does not mean that an effort should be made to scare or shock the American people. It does mean that they should be convinced of the frankness of the government in presenting the situation.” Yet PA also saw drawbacks in releasing NSC-68 in its entirety. Interestingly, this was not because NSC-68 contained too much exaggerated prose that would “scare and shock” the public. Quite the opposite: PA believed that NSC-68 was “too sophisticated for public use in its present form. It takes for granted too much knowledge on the part of the reader.” Because it had been drafted before the Korean crisis, it also contained numerous passages that were clearly out of date. In a review completed in November, PA was adamant about this: “The NSC-68 series is too complex for public use without a convenient summary and a more direct statement of problems and conclusions.” It was also “overly technical”—“much of the language and treatment in these papers has the narrow currency of one group of experts speaking to another group of experts... Its end result is a cold, sophisticated document.”⁸²

By the end of November, such criticism had been taken on board and planning was proceeding apace. As MacArthur launched his “end the war” offensive in Korea, the administration decided to begin the task of publicizing NSC-68 in the New Year. An information campaign at this juncture would be especially vital, given the prospect of an unruly Congress and a public prone to a “let down” once the troops returned from Korea. In such an environment, the president’s state of the union address would provide the launching pad, followed by a concerted effort by prominent public and private figures, and perhaps even a pamphlet outlining NSC-68’s “less sophisticated points”—probably chapters four

and seven, on the underlying conflict and the risks to the United States, as well as Annex eight on the “Strategy of Freedom.”⁸³ At lunchtime on 27 November, Acheson met with Truman to finalize these ideas. The two men went through the various suggestions for placing NSC-68 at the forefront of public debate, including a “Citizens Committee, the making of statements for them ... foreshadowing NSC-68, an advisory group, etc.” Finally convinced of the wisdom of this course, the president “thought that the administration should take a vigorous fighting attitude in support of our foreign policy” and agreed that all the State Department’s ideas “were wise and suggested that we go ahead developing these as rapidly as possible.”⁸⁴

Yet what had seemed like a good idea on 27 November, suddenly appeared hopelessly out of date 24 hours later, when Washington finally got word of the massive Chinese intervention in Korea. Unlike June, when the dominant instinct among officials had been to try to keep the home front cool, now no one attempted to hide the seriousness of this turn of events. On the contrary, with UN forces being flung into headlong retreat, Acheson believed that the administration had to “take dramatic measures to reverse the business-as-usual tendencies in the country.” In complete agreement, Truman moved swiftly to discard the NSC-68 timetable that had so recently been worked out. Thus, rather than wait for the new Congress to convene, within days the president successfully prevailed upon the lame-duck session to appropriate an additional \$18 billion, taking the total defense spending for the year to \$42 billion. Rather than unveiling the package in his state of the union address, on 15 December Truman delivered a fireside chat in which he not only called for an immediate expansion of the armed forces to 3.5 million but also declared a state of emergency in the hope that this would “have great psychological effects on the American people.” And, above all, rather than striving to complete the defense buildup in the four years originally envisaged in NSC-68, the whole process was now to be drastically expedited. “So far as procurement goes,” Marshall told a senior congressional delegation, “we are going to try to procure by 1952 what we had planned to procure by 1954.”⁸⁵

In stark contrast to the summer, for a brief period officials also sought to ratchet up the rhetoric. Developments in Korea, Acheson now declared, have created “a situation of unparalleled danger. No one can guarantee that war will not come.” “We are not in a world war,” Marshall stressed, “but we are in a period of the greatest tension and [are] facing the possibility of such a catastrophe.” Meanwhile, the president was even candid about who he believed the real culprit to be. “Our homes, our nation, all the things we believe in, are in great danger” the president told the public in his 15 December fireside chat on. “This danger has been created by the rulers of the Soviet Union.”⁸⁶

Such statements were intended to give a clear lead at a time when PA feared that public opinion “is in a very serious condition. In the absence of strong, positive leadership in Washington,” Barrett warned, “the situation is ripe for mountebanks of various sorts to move in and fill the void.”⁸⁷ In December, this was no idle warning. In the space of a few weeks, Herbert Hoover and Joseph Kennedy both made prominent speeches calling on the United States to withdraw its defensive perimeter to the Western Hemisphere. In Congress, the Republican leadership was so emboldened by its gains in the recent midterm elections that the likes of Taft and Wherry were openly questioning the administration’s determination to send U.S. troops to Europe. Taft even told reporters that he had “no great confidence” in the judgment of America’s military leadership. In a barbed assault that cut to the very heart of the administration’s entire PR strategy, Taft charged that there is “a kind of wavering between panic and reassurance that goes right on up to the Pentagon.”⁸⁸

In this fervid environment, senior officials fretted that the omens for NSC-68 were not terribly good. To be sure, Congress had swiftly voted all the money the administration had recently asked for, and there had even been familiar complaints that officials were “not moving fast enough.” Truman had also established the machinery to launch a more intensive mobilization effort, appointing Charles E. Wilson to head the Office of Defense Mobilization.⁸⁹ But in the Pentagon officials worried that panicky sections of congressional and mass opinion might now push the military into a massive mobilization that would be

too swift and ultimately unsustainable. On the other hand, with issues like universal military training and whether or not to send U.S. troops to Europe still pending, and with so many “mountebanks” jockeying to take America in a more isolationist direction, it also seemed possible that key components of NSC-68 might yet come unstuck. Determined to navigate a steady course between these two extremes, both the State and Defense Departments recognized that an intensive information campaign remained vitally important.

Yet the crisis mood, far from being an unbridled boon, actually placed significant obstacles in the way of such a campaign. Part of the problem was the State Department’s growing ineffectiveness as a mouthpiece for administration policy. By the winter, McCarthy’s charges that the department was full of communists were clearly hitting the mark, with a recent poll finding that 64 percent of respondents believed that at least some of its officials were disloyal. By now, Acheson was also the principal target of sustained Republican assaults, which only mounted in intensity after November when he publicly likened the prospect of the GOP’s proposed reexamination of U.S. foreign policy to “the man who doesn’t know whether he really loves his wife.”⁹⁰ A month later, at the very height of the new crisis in Korea, Republican members of Congress voted overwhelmingly in favor of a party resolution calling on Acheson to resign. The president defiantly refused to be intimidated by this action, telling reporters on more than one occasion that Acheson would definitely stay. But the secretary of state was now a deeply polarizing figure—his public appearances, far from providing a chance sell policy, often became the perfect opportunity for Republicans to launch all measure of assaults against the administration. By January, the situation was so bad that the State Department decided it was prudent to limit Acheson’s speech schedule. He must not become “the principle [*sic*] antagonist of opposition spokesmen in the ‘great debate,’” the department’s Working Group on Public Relations concluded. “The Secretary should not take so prominent a place in the current public discussions as to revive antagonism to him as a personality.”⁹¹

This state of affairs naturally worried PR officials in the State Department. But what could be done? Increasingly unable to make their case directly to the public, State Department officials moved instead toward holding a series of off-the-record meetings with reporters, columnists, and broadcasters, with Acheson alone talking privately to journalists on a host of occasions during December and January. More importantly, the State Department also resorted to another tried and tested method: getting others to do the work for you. On 12 December, the Committee on the Present Danger (CPD) released its inaugural statement, calling for increased military spending, greater economic controls, and universal military service. Containing many of the prominent figures who had played a significant role in generating support for preparedness in 1940-41, the CPD was only formed after discussions with senior officials at the Pentagon, and it remained in close contact with the administration in the months to come.⁹² Throughout the winter crisis, Marshall also took up a good deal of the slack, testifying before various congressional committees on no less than eight occasions between the end of November and the middle of February, while his deputy made eighteen separate appearances.⁹³

In many respects this was the resurrection of the old team that had helped to garner support for the Marshall Plan: the revered general, ably supported by a cast of leading private citizens. Recently, historians have also made much of the Truman administration's general propensity to rely on informal "state-private networks" to sell its policies. Indeed, Robert Griffith, Michael Wala, Scott Lucas, and Nancy Bernhard have all explored the relationships the Truman administration developed with pressure groups, nongovernmental organizations, and the media, pointing to various motives, from a desire to avoid the taint of excessive official propagandizing to the ideological belief that freedom required private enterprise to carry the publicity burden.⁹⁴ Yet though these calculations may have been important at other times, in the winter of 1950-51 the State Department's main reason for intensifying its behind-the-scenes relationship with such individuals and institutions was more straightforward: because direct public statements by Acheson were apt to result in

another round of bipartisan wrangling, officials deemed an indirect approach to be about the only way left to get their arguments across.⁹⁵

Unfortunately, however, when it came to NSC-68 the White House no longer agreed. On the contrary, shaken by the direction of the war, and fearful lest the enemy glean important information from these indiscreet background briefings, at the start of January the president was ready to order a clamp down. As he angrily told the NSC, “public disclosure of classified information regarding this government’s national security policies and plans in these critical times has become so flagrant in recent weeks that I feel compelled to bring this matter to your attention at this meeting.” Truman was particularly concerned about “recent disclosures in the press and radio of highly classified atomic energy information and top-secret data contained in the NSC-68 series.” In the current crisis, he now deemed the divulgence of such material to be completely unacceptable. He even moved to ensure that his state of the union speech became merely a general defense of government policy rather than the launching pad for an intensive attempt to sell NSC-68⁹⁶

Truman’s determination to keep a tight rein on what his officials disclosed came at a particularly torrid moment. As UN forces continued their long retreat down the Korean peninsula, the domestic mood was particularly complex and confusing. Coexisting uneasily beside the signs of re-emergent isolationism were familiar indications that many influential spokesmen were again attracted by radical panaceas. Indeed, some legislators were now calling for tough action against the Chinese, from issuing an ultimatum if Beijing refused ceasefire terms to the launching of a guerrilla war on the Chinese mainland. More worryingly, rumors were also floating around Washington that a new preventive-war pressure group was about to be organized, headed by the ex-communist Frieda Utley and supported by figures like Father Edmund A. Walsh, who had just provided the moral justification for such a belligerent course in a *Washington Sunday Star* article. In this frenzied environment, the State Department even heard a rumor that the CPD was in favor of radical action. As one journalist told a PPS official, in public CPD leaders like James

Conant and Vannevar Bush might be staunch opponents of preventive war. But behind the scenes, they were part of a group that “was convinced that time was *not* on our side and that this country should in 1951 force the issue with the Soviet Union. The conclusion was that the United States should use its atomic superiority against the Soviet Union this year.”⁹⁷

With Symington at the NSRB circulating NSC-100, which called for the United States to adopt a more vigorous Cold War posture, and with some senior air force officials privately telling reporters that by July the United States would have enough atomic bombs to “flatten” the USSR in 30 days,⁹⁸ top policymakers deemed it vital once more to try to cool down the home front. As Marshall put it, the country had to move ahead with its mobilization program “with determination, but also with patience and calm deliberation.” Meanwhile, in his background briefings, Acheson was again anxious to avoid any self-fulfilling prophecies, along the lines of the old fear that if the assumption took hold that “we are fighting a war tomorrow,” then “the inevitable result will be to make this assumption come true.” He therefore denied that officials had a “date toward which were aiming our military buildup.... He did not believe war was inevitable,” Acheson hastened to add, and “he did not feel that any secretary of state should ever base his policy on the assumption that all our energies should be directed toward preparing ourselves for war at a given date.”⁹⁹

A few months later, PA conducted an opinion survey of popular attitudes toward “the national objectives set forth in NSC-68,” and found the public “appears by all reliable objective criteria to be favorably disposed.” Indeed, 83 percent wanted to continue the current levels of high spending on rearmament, 52 percent supported economic assistance to allies, and 57 percent favored sending U.S. troops to Europe. Such an endorsement ought not to have come as a major surprise, because, despite all the vicissitudes of the Korean War, polling data had demonstrated remarkably consistent levels of support for the main recommendations of NSC-68 throughout the past year. Since July 1950, for instance, popular approval for sending military supplies to Europe had never dipped below 70

percent. In September, as officials started to worry about a “let down,” surveys had even found that 72 percent supported steps to build up an army of Japanese soldiers, while Truman’s announcement that he approved of “substantial increases” in U.S. troop strength in Western Europe was “widely supported.”¹⁰⁰

Yet such data had not always played a prominent role in all the administration’s fretting about how best to sell NSC-68. Instead, officials had principally tackled this problem on the basis of a set of shared assumptions about how their domestic audience behaved in periods of crisis—assumptions that suggested that the popular mood was prone to violent oscillations, and that the task of leadership was thus to respond to the frequent peaks and troughs. This basic rejection of polls was not due simply to the specific fact that Truman was notoriously suspicious of such data. It was also due to the more general consideration that on many questions decision makers do not find polls to be all that useful. Polls, after all, reveal only what the public is currently thinking about a particular issue. But what decision makers often require is an assessment of how the public will react in the future, especially if the environment changes dramatically.

This is not to say, however, that officials had no hard data to support their view of a volatile public. During 1950 and early 1951, they received a lot of pertinent information from Capitol Hill, where a number of legislators warned that their constituency mail was running overwhelmingly in favor of ideas bordering on preventive war. Although a number of historians have alluded to the existence of militant sentiments inside the United States during this period, in the literature the whole concept of preventive war is often viewed as an irrelevance (a “straw option” contained in NSC-68) or a curiosity (an idea without sufficient support to be implemented). At the time, however, senior officials were not so confident. In periods of acute crisis, they were especially concerned that the demand for a preventive strike might grow still further, particularly given that influential legislators and certain sections of the Defense establishment—what one State Department memorandum referred to as “uncomprehending and impatient elements within both the administration and

the Senate”¹⁰¹—seemed inclined to push for a radical course whenever the going got rough. In retrospect, such fears might appear excessive. But at the time, they cast a significant shadow over the administration’s actions, pushing officials toward a series of attempts to try to keep the home front cool.

Indeed, preventive war sentiment was one of the central reasons why the Truman administration’s efforts to lead were often subdued and low key. Particularly during periods of military defeat in the summer of 1950 and the winter of 1951, officials deemed it vital to make sustained efforts to head-off a potential hysteria and panic. In these months, there was to be no “psychological scare campaign,” no “clearer-than-truth” rhetoric. In stark contrast to conventional wisdom, which places the Truman administration in the vanguard of the public debate, dragging an apathetic public toward mobilization with scare-mongering speeches, officials at the time often saw themselves trying to navigate a steady central course between the perils of isolation on the one hand and preventive war on the other. In their view, this was a far from easy task. In fact, even though Congress swiftly provided all the appropriations that were requested in July and December, officials constantly worried that the unstable mood would undermine their efforts to sustain a long-term mobilization. Moreover, because their subdued information campaign often lagged behind the public’s demands for swifter and more vigorous action, officials also left themselves open to the political charge that they failed to recognize the extent of the danger facing the country. At a time when the implementation of NSC-68 was more than doubling the size of America’s armed forces, as well as leading to a staggering 262 percent increase in defense appropriations, this may have been a curious charge. But ultimately, it was to prove one of the central consequences of the Truman administration’s deliberate rejection of a psychological scare campaign.

NOTES

¹ An earlier version of this paper was delivered at Odd Arne Westad's LSE Cold War Seminar. The author would like to thank both the participants in this seminar, and the anonymous reviewers for *Diplomatic History*, for their helpful comments. The author would also like to thank the Truman Library and the University of London Central Research Fund for the award of a travel grants, as well as Randy Sowell, Dennis Bilger, Liz Safly, and Lisa Sullivan at the Truman Library for their helpful assistance.

² *FRUS, 1950*, 1: 170-72, 191, 225-26. See also NSC-68 reprinted in Ernest R. May, ed., *American Cold War Strategy: Interpreting NSC-68* (Boston, 1993), 43, 54. The focus of this article is on the government's publicity efforts, and not on the actual development of the NSC-68 policy, which has been dealt with extensively elsewhere. See, for instance, Paul Y. Hammond, "NSC-68: Prologue to Rearmament," in Warner R. Schilling, et al, *Strategy, Politics, and Defense Budgets* (New York, 1962), 271-378; Samuel F. Wells, Jr., "Sounding the Tocsin: NSC-68 and the Soviet Threat," *International Security*, 4 (1979): 116-58; Paul H. Nitze, "The Development of NSC-68," *International Security*, 4 (1980): 170-76; Melvyn P. Leffler, *A Preponderance of Power: National Security, the Truman Administration, and the Cold War* (Stanford, 1992), 355-60, 369-74; Walter S. Poole, *The JCS and National Policy, 1950-1952. Volume 4: National Security* (Washington DC, 1998), 3-39.

³ See, for example, John Lewis Gaddis, *The United States and the Origins of the Cold War* (New York, 1972), 351-52; Richard M. Freeland, *The Truman Doctrine and the Origins of McCarthyism* (New York, 1985); Thomas G. Paterson, "Presidential Foreign Policy, Public Opinion, and Congress: The Truman Years," *Diplomatic History*, 3 (1979): 3-4; Frank Kofsky, *Harry S. Truman and the War Scare of 1948* (New York, 1993).

⁴ *FRUS, 1950*, 1: 226; Dean Acheson, *Present at the Creation: My Years in the State Department* (New York, 1969), 374-75.

⁵ See, for example, John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment* (Oxford, 1982), 108; Thomas J. Christensen, *Useful Adversaries: Grand Strategy, Domestic Mobilization, and Sino-American Conflict, 1947-1958* (Princeton, 1996), 125-27, 180-1; Michael J. Hogan, *Cross of Iron: Harry S. Truman and the Origins of the National Security State, 1945-1954* (Cambridge, 1998), 300-1; Nancy E. Bernhard, "Clearer Than Truth: Public Affairs Television and the State Department's Domestic Information Campaigns," *Diplomatic History*, 21 (1997): 561-63; idem, *U.S. Television News and Cold War Propaganda, 1947-1960* (Cambridge, 1999), 83-86; Scott Lucas, *Freedom's War: The U.S. Crusade against the Soviet Union, 1945-1956* (Manchester, 1999).

⁶ Hammond, "NSC-68: Prologue to Rearmament," 370; Barton J. Bernstein, "The Week We Went to War: American Intervention in the Korean Civil War," *Foreign Service Journal*, 54 (February 1977), 9; Robert Jervis, "The Impact of the Korean War on the Cold War," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 24 (1980): 563; Gaddis, *Strategies*, 109. Some historians have even speculated that Acheson invited the North Korean attack in order to rally support for NSC-68, or at least encouraged Truman to intervene for this reason. See Bruce Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War: The Roaring of the Cataract* (Princeton, 1990), 2: 431-35; Benjamin O. Fordham, *Building the Cold War Consensus: The Political Economy of U.S. National Security Policy* (Ann Arbor, 1998), 68-69, 115-16.

⁷ Most accounts focus on the extent to which opinion influenced policy rather than presentation, see Paterson, "Presidential Foreign Policy," 1-18; Walter LaFeber, "American Policymakers, Public Opinion, and the Outbreak of the Cold War, 1945-50," Nagai Yonosuke and Akira Iriye, ed., *The Origins of the Cold War in Asia* (Tokyo, 1977), 49, 60; Nancy B. Tucker, *Patterns in the Dust: Chinese-American Relations and the Recognition Controversy, 1949-1950* (New York, 1983).

⁸ Bernhard, "Clearer Than Truth," 546-47; Robert Griffith, "The Selling of America: The Advertising Council and American Politics, 1942-1960," *Business History Review*, 57 (1983): 388-412; Michael Wala, "Selling the Marshall Plan at Home: The Committee for the Marshall Plan to Aid European Recovery," *Diplomatic History*, 10 (1986): 247-65; Wells, "Sounding the Tocsin," 116-58.

⁹ For recent political-science studies on the government's more direct efforts at selling, see Martin J. Medhurst, Robert L. Ivie, Philip Wander, and Robert L. Scott, *Cold War Rhetoric: Strategy, Metaphor, and Ideology* (New York, 1990); Amos Kiewe, ed., *The Modern Presidency and Crisis Rhetoric* (Westport, 1994). Some recent studies have shed important light on the Truman administration's relationship with Congress. See, in particular, Hogan, *A Cross of Iron*. But the interaction between the executive and legislature is still a relatively neglected subject. See Robert David Johnson, "Congress and the Cold War," *Journal of Cold War Studies*, 3 (2001): 76-100

¹⁰ House Armed Services Committee, *Defense Appropriations, FY 1951* (Washington DC, 1950), 2659-61; Edward A. Kolodziej, *The Uncommon Defense and Congress, 1945-1963* (Columbus, OH, 1966), 89-107, 119-23; Steven L. Rearden, *History of the Office of the Secretary of Defense. Volume 1: The Formative Years, 1947-1950* (Washington DC, 1984), 75, 376-82. Observations on Truman's speech are by Sir Oliver Franks, 7 January 1950, FO371/81615, Public Record Office, Kew, England.

¹¹ Franks to Sir William Strang, 19 April 1950, FO371/81615. Franks was recounting a conversation with Gordon Gray, George Perkins, and James Webb.

¹² Carlton Savage to Nitze, 2 May 1950, PPS Files, NSC-68, subject box 54, State Department Papers, RG 59, National Archives II, College Park, MD [hereafter NAI].

¹³ Brien McMahon, "The Hydrogen Bomb: A Plan for Atomic Peace," 2 February 1950; "Peace and Problems of Atomic Energy," 1 March 1950; both in Address and Press Releases File, box 7, McMahon Papers, Library of Congress [hereafter LC]. See also Francis H. Russell to Mr. Rusk and Mr. Nitze, 6 February 1950, Asst. Secretary of State for Congressional Relations Files, subject box 3, RG 59.

¹⁴ The press soon reported that McMahon was receiving a "deluge" of approving mail over his suggestion. PA, "Daily Opinion Summary," [hereafter DOPS] 2 February and 10 March 1950, Office of Public Opinion Studies, Schuyler Foster Files, box 4, RG 59.

¹⁵ On the congressional reaction, see PA, DOPS, 7 and 17 February 1950, and 2 March 1950.

¹⁶ Poole, *The JCS and National Policy*, 4: 4-5, 9; Paul H. Nitze, *From Hiroshima to Glasnost* (New York, 1989), 96.

¹⁷ *FRUS*, 1950, 1: 185-87, 225-26.

¹⁸ *FRUS*, 1950, 1: 225-26. NSC-68 itself only briefly discussed this problem, recommending that "sufficient information regarding the basic political, economic, and military elements of the present situation be made publicly available so that an intelligent popular opinion may be formed." May, ed., *American Cold War Strategy*, 43.

¹⁹ *Department of State Bulletin* [hereafter *DSB*], 22 (1950): 272-74, 427-30. For observations on the background to these speeches, see British Embassy, "Weekly Political Summary," 18 March 1950, FO 371/81611. On the ideological language of NSC-68, see Rosenberg, "Commentary," in May, ed., *American Cold War Strategy*, 160-64.

²⁰ Herter, Memo of Conversation with Acheson, 21 March 1950, Political Files, bMS AM 1829 (c.890), Herter Papers, Houghton Library, Harvard University [hereafter HU]; *FRUS*, 1950, 1: 206-9, 225; *DSB*, 22 (1950): 673-75, 1038-39. See also Savage to Nitze, 2 May 1950.

²¹ For public and private comments by senior officials in this vein, see Robert H. Ferrell, ed., *Off the Record: The Private Papers of Harry S. Truman* (Columbia, MO, 1980), 98-99, 134; *DSB*, 23 (1950): 208, 799. See also footnote 67 below.

²² Gabriel A. Almond, *The American People and Foreign Policy* (New York, 1950), 86; Martin Kriesberg, "Public Opinion: Dark Areas of Ignorance," in Lester Markel, ed., *Public Opinion and Foreign Policy* (New York, 1949), 49-64. On the social-science debate, see Ole R. Holsti, "Public Opinion and Foreign Policy: Challenges to the Almond-Lippmann Consensus," *International Studies Quarterly*, 36 (1992), 441-43. On the

State Department's awareness of, and connections with, these authors, see, for instance, Russell to Almond, 29 August 1950, Asst. Secretary of State for PA, Russell Files, subject box 1, RG 59; "Some Notes on Popular Knowledge Concerning Current Foreign Affairs," 22 January 1951, Foster Files, box 20.

²³ Russell to Rusk and Nitze, 6 February 1950.

²⁴ Wells, "Sounding the Tocsin," 141-47; Rosenberg, "Commentary," 62.

²⁵ PA, DOPS, 9 March 1950. This comment was made in a *Christian Science Monitor* review of George Kennan's, "Is War with Russia Inevitable?" *Reader's Digest* (1950), 1-9, which praised Kennan for offering a "potent antidote" to the fluctuating popular mood.

²⁶ *FRUS*, 1950, 1: 140-41

²⁷ "Significance of the H-Bomb, and America's Dilemma," *Newsweek*, 13 February 1950, 20. In the conversation between Acheson and Herter, cited above, the Massachusetts congressman provided further evidence of the belligerent drift of thinking on the Hill. "My last word to him," Herter recorded, "was that I hoped that if Joe Stalin did not come through with his assistance in precipitating crises which would wake up the American people to the situation that he himself would not hesitate to create the crises himself." Acheson did not respond. Herter, Memo of Conversation with Acheson, 21 March 1950

²⁸ *FRUS*, 1950, 1: 185-87. On preventive war sentiment at this time, see Russell D. Buhite and Wm. Christopher Hamel, "War for Peace: The Question of an American Preventive War against the Soviet Union, 1945-1955," *Diplomatic History*, 14 (1990): 374-75; Marc Trachtenberg, "A 'Wasting Asset': American Strategy and the Shifting Nuclear Balance, 1949-1954," *International Security*, 13 (1988/89): 20-21.

²⁹ *FRUS*, 1950, 1: 312-13, 323-24. For the NSRB position, see Thomas G. Lanipher, Memo for Mr. Symington, 17 May 1950, Security Classified Office Files: NSC Folder, box 17, Office of Civil and Defense Mobilization Papers, RG 304, NAIL.

³⁰ *DSB*, 22 (1950): 673-74; Bernhard, "Clearer Than Truth," 563.

³¹ *DSB*, 23 (1950): 378, 615.

³² Senate Appropriations Committee, *Defense Appropriations, FY 1951* (Washington SC, 1950), 73; Poole, *The JCS and National Policy*, 4: 11-12.

³³ Truman, Public Papers, 2 March 1950, <http://www.trumanlibrary.org/publicpapers/index.php>.

³⁴ Hooker to Nitze, "Proposed Statement by President Truman," 22 March 1950, PPS Files, subject box 54.

³⁵ Memo for Johnson, 25 April 1950, Safe File, box 139, Louis A. Johnson Papers, University of Virginia. PA, DOPS, 14 and 19 April 1950, and 5 May 1950.

- ³⁶ Truman, Public Papers, 4 May 1950. For Tydings's comments see British Embassy, "Weekly Political Summary," 29 April and 6 May 1950, FO 371/81611.
- ³⁷ Ernest K. Lindley, "Washington Tides: Is There a Real Danger of War?" *Newsweek*, May 15, 1950, 27.
- ³⁸ Truman, Public Papers, 4 and 25 May 1950, and 10 June 1950.
- ³⁹ Joseph W. Alsop, "I've Seen the Best of It" (New York, 1992), 301-2. Hogan, *A Cross of Iron*, 305-7.
- ⁴⁰ Erasmus H. Kloman, "Notes on Public Relations Working Group Meeting," 11 July 1950, Asst. Secretary of State for PA Files, Records of PRWG, box 1, RG 59.
- ⁴¹ Johnson, "Statement," 25 July 1950, PSF, Speech File, Johnson folder, box 43, Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library, Independence, MO [hereafter HSTL].
- ⁴² Alexis Johnson, "Interview with Representative Kruse," 6 July 1950, Asst. Secretary of State for Congressional Relations Files, subject box 2; "Statement by the Secretary of State," 24 July 1950, Senate Foreign Relations Committee, *Reviews of the World Situation, 1949-1950* (Washington DC, 1974), 321.
- ⁴³ Eban Ayers Diary, 25 and 29 June 1950, box 20, Ayers Papers, HSTL; "Truman Calls Senate Leaders to 4th 2-Party Meeting Today," *Washington Post*, 11 July 1950.
- ⁴⁴ Shulman to Barrett, "Secretary's Speech to Newspaper Guild," 28 June 1950, Elsey Papers, box 71.
- ⁴⁵ *FRUS, 1950, 7*: 158, 169-70, 186-87; Edward R. Barrett, *Truth Is Our Weapon* (New York, 1953), 157.
- ⁴⁶ Hardy to Brown, "Collected Statements of the Secretary on Necessity of Strength," 9 August 1950, Russell Files, subject box 10; "Information Objectives for the Rest of 1950," 16 August 1950, PA Files, Numbered Information Memoranda, box 2, RG 59.
- ⁴⁷ Acheson, Memo, 14 July 1950, box 66, Acheson Papers, HSTL; James F. Schnabel and Robert J. Watson, *The JCS and National Policy, 1950-1951. Volume 3: The Korean War*, (Washington DC, 1998), 76-84.
- ⁴⁸ "Preparation of President's Message to Congress on Korea, 19 July 1950," box 71, Elsey Papers; Alonzo L. Hamby, *Beyond the New Deal* (New York, 1973), 415; Paul G. Pierpaoli, *Truman and Korea: The Political Culture of the Early Cold War* (Columbia MO, 1999), 33.
- ⁴⁹ Truman, Public Papers, 19 July 1950; Doris M. Condit, *History of the Office of the Secretary of Defense: The Test of War, 1950-1953* (Washington DC, 1988), 227.
- ⁵⁰ W. J. McWilliam to Dulles, 20 July 1950, Correspondence File, Barrett folder, box 47, Dulles Papers, Princeton University (hereafter PU).
- ⁵¹ Ronald J. Caridi, *The Korean War and American Politics: The Republican Party as a Case Study* (Philadelphia, 1968); David R. Kepley, *The Collapse of the Middle Way: Senate Republicans and the Bipartisan*

Foreign Policy, 1948-1952 (New York, 1988). These accounts of the demise of bipartisanship generally neglect the role played by the issue of mobilization.

⁵² This was the thrust of Senator Henry Cabot Lodge's (R-MA) position, when he called for "an all-out preparedness effort that would know no party line." See "Lodge Closes Rift on Foreign Policy," *Washington Post*, 16 August 1950.

⁵³ Taft to LeVander, 11 August 1950, War (Korean) Folder, box 924, Taft Papers, LC.

⁵⁴ A point made by Senator Homer E. Capehart (R-IN). See Senate Banking and Currency Committee, *Defense Production Act Hearings* (Washington DC, 1950), 135.

⁵⁵ Gallup, "Public Would Rather Risk War Than Permit Red Expansion," *Washington Post*, 4 August 1950; "Published Views on Current Temper of American People," 19 September 1950, Foster Files, box 20.

⁵⁶ James T. Patterson, *Mr. Republican* (Boston, 1972), 454-55; Taft, "The Economic Situation Produced by the Korean Crisis," 24 July 1950, box 628, Taft Papers, LC.

⁵⁷ "15 Republicans Urge Standby Control Setup," *Washington Post*, July 31, 1950. For the debate in Congress, see *Congressional Record*, 1950, 11506-11535, 1159102, 11609-11637, 11726-11769, 11830-11868, 12150-12177, 12197-12225, 12397-12412, 12910-11.

⁵⁸ Pierpaoli, *Truman and Korea*, 35-36.

⁵⁹ "Text of GOP Senators' Statement Charging Foreign Policy Bungling in Europe, Asia," *New York Times*, 14 August 1950; Kepley, *Collapse of the Middle Way*, 95-97.

⁶⁰ Nitze to Webb, 14 August 1950, PPS Files, Consultants Folder, box 8.

⁶¹ Theodore Tannenwald Diary, 15 August 1950, box 1, Tannenwald Papers, HSTL; McFall, "Material for Answer to Republicans," 15 August 1950, Asst. Secretary of State for Congressional Relations Files, subject box 1.

⁶² "North Atlantic Union and Related Matters," 14 August 1940, box 67, Acheson Papers.

⁶³ Marshall, Memo of Conversation with Vorys, 15 July 1950, Asst. Secretary of State for Congressional Relations Files, subject box 2. The day before, Vorys had commented privately that "we could be bled white by a series of incidents like Korea, while the other fellows are arming to the teeth. Some way or other, we have got to have a showdown before they are stronger than we are in atomic weapons, in addition to having superior strength in men and arms." At the same time, however, Vorys also opposed any public talk of using the A-bomb, especially in Korea, lest this encourage the Soviets to launch their own preventive strike. See Vorys to McClellan, 14 July 1950; Vorys to Giovanello, 24 July 1950; Vorys to Slick, 2 August 1950; all in General File, box 29, Vorys Papers, Ohio Historical Society.

⁶⁴ PA, DOPS, 16 August 1950. For similar sentiments expressed on the floor of the House by Clare E. Hoffman (R-MI), William M. Colmer (D-MS), and Charles E. Potter (R-MI), see *Congressional Record, 1950*, 11431-32, 11511-12, 11616-17.

⁶⁵ Arthur Krock, Memo, July 1950, Works and Memoranda Book II, box 1, Arthur Krock Papers, PU. Top Secret Memo, 17 August 1950, box 307, Harriman Papers, LC; "Memo of Conversation between C.B. Marshall and A Person whose Name is Withheld," 26 August 1950, PPS Files, State-Defense Relations, box 12.

⁶⁶ Matthews, "Aggressors for Peace Speech," 25 August 1950, Francis P. Matthews Papers, HSTL. Also to Hibbs, 31 August 1950, Special Correspondence folder, box 27, Alsop Papers, LC. The State Department made a vain attempt to get Johnson to renounce in public the notion "that war is inevitable." See Walter K. Schwinn to Russell, 29 August 1950, Russell Files, subject box 5.

⁶⁷ Truman, Public Papers, 7 September 1950.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 1 and 9 September. The comment to a reporter was by Elsey; see Booth to Birmingham, "Prex Week—Speech," 2 September 1950, Dispatches from *Time Magazine* Correspondents, 1st Series, Folder 601, HU.

⁶⁹ "Popular Sentiment on the Handling of U.S. Foreign Policy," 20 October 1950; "Popular Attitudes Toward Halting Further Communist Aggression," 23 October 1950. Both in Foster Files, box 20.

⁷⁰ Delia Kuhn to Mr. Phillips and Mr. Micocci, 3 October 1950 Russell Files, subject box 5. For Marshall's views, see "Minutes of Marshall's Press Conference," 27 March 1951, box 206, folder 58, Marshall Papers, VMI, Lexington, VA; Poole, *The JCS and National Policy*, 4: 35.

⁷¹ Fordham, *Building the Cold War Consensus*, 175-78. The only evidence linking the two events, is the recollection by the Secretary of the Army that Marshall worried about the consequences of "too precipitate an end to the war"; see Frank Pace, Oral History Transcript, HSTL.

⁷² *FRUS, 1950*, 7: 453-54, 480-81; William W. Stueck, *The Road to Confrontation: American Policy toward China and Korea, 1947-1950* (Chapel Hill, 1981), 204-6.

⁷³ "Controls to Stay, Sawyer Declares," *New York Times*, 24 September 1950; "U.S. Must Keep Up Its Forces Sent to Europe, Bradley Says," *Washington Post*, 28 September 1950.

⁷⁴ Truman, Public Papers, 28 September 1950; "Leaders Fear U.S. May Ease Arms Effort," *Washington Post*, 1 October 1950; "Marshall Reveals a Defense Program of 4 Years or More," *New York Times*, 6 November 1950.

⁷⁵ *FRUS, 1950*, 3: 377, 429-30. For Hoover's comments, see PA, DOPS, 20 October 1950.

⁷⁶ Symington to Kenneth W. McKellar, 14 September 1950, Classified Office Files: Congressional Correspondence Folder, box 13, RG 304. For observations on the Chicago exercise, see Berkeley Gage to Peter Stephens, 9 October 1950, FO 371/81733.

⁷⁷ Minutes of the 63rd Meeting of the NSC, 29 September 1950, box 3, NSC Papers, RG 73, NAI; Marshall to Nitze, 3 October 1950, PPS Files, subject box 54; Condit, *The Test of War*, 231-33, 235-37; Hogan, *Cross of Iron*, 308-10.

⁷⁸ Elsey, "Memo Concerning the President's Address to the UN," 10 November 1950, Speech File, box 47, Elsey Papers. According to Truman's chief speechwriter, even "the talk about negotiation itself was toned down." See Murphy, Memo for Mr. Symington, 23 October 1950, SMOF: Murphy Files, UN Assembly Speech Folder, box 8, HSTL.

⁷⁹ Republican Party, Minority Policy Committee, "Observations on the Truman Administration's Relations with the People," October 1950, Speech Material, bMS AM 1829 (e.1360), Herter Papers; PA, DOPS, 5 and 6 October 1950.

⁸⁰ Marshall to Nitze, "Legislative Prospect," 15 November 1950, PPS Files, Congressional Folder, box 8. Some internationalists were even more pessimistic about the likely make-up of the 82d Congress. According to Senator Lodge, there were only "twelve Republican senators, of which he was one, who regard the defense of Western Europe as a matter of urgent priority. There are some 25 to 30 Republican senators who are divided roughly into three schools. The first is bent on economy. The second school of thought would throw our might in the Far Eastern area because it believes that area to be important than the European area. The third school of thought is for defending the Western Hemisphere and giving up on the policy of arming our allies who can't be trusted anyway." DW [David Wainhouse], "Conversation with Senator Lodge," 11 November 1950, Asst. Secretary for Congressional Relations Files, subject box 1.

⁸¹ Nitze to Acheson, 9 October 1950, PPS Files, box 54.

⁸² Foster to Russell, 10 October 1950, Foster Files, box 20. "Memo on Public Information Concerning NSC-68," 18 October 1950; Russell to J.M. Flanagan, "Memo on Release of NSC-68 as a Public Document," 28 November 1950; both in Russell Files, subject box 6. Other officials also warned against a scare campaign. "The tone of the department's guidance should be one of cool calculations of the problems we face and of the dangers inherent in this particular period," recommended Delia Kuhn of PA. "It should avoid all suggestion of crisis or showdown with the USSR. It should impart a sense of direction and confidence in our ability to see the job through." Kuhn to Phillips and Micocci, 3 October 1950.

⁸³ Minutes, Undersecretaries Meeting, 17 November 1950, PA, National Security Files, subject box 57. Russell to Flanagan, "Memo on Release of NSC-68"; Barrett to Nitze, 15 November 1950; Russell to Barrett, 16 November 1950; Notes of Conversation between Russell and Elsey, 21 November 1950; all in Russell Files, subject box 11.

- ⁸⁴ Memo of Conversation with the President, 27 November 1950, box 67, Acheson Papers.
- ⁸⁵ Handwritten Notes of PPS Meetings, 12 December 1950, PPS Files, Staff Notes of Meetings, box 78. "Notes for the Secretary," 2 December 1950, Acheson Papers, box 67. Meeting of the President with Congressional Leaders, 13 December 1950, Elsey Papers, subject box 73.
- ⁸⁶ "Acheson Declares War Risk Is Grave"; "Marshall Warns Nation Is Facing Long Period of Partial Mobilization"; both in *New York Times*, 30 November 1950. Truman, Public Papers, 15 December 1950. Robert L. Ivie, "Declaring a National Emergency: Truman's Rhetorical Crisis and the Great Debate of 1951," in Kiewe, ed., *The Modern Presidency and Crisis Rhetoric*, 3-5.
- ⁸⁷ *FRUS*, 1950, 1:423.
- ⁸⁸ "Taft Lacks 'Great Confidence' in U.S. Military," *Washington Post*, 30 December 1950.
- ⁸⁹ Pierpaoli, *Truman and Korea*, 44-45, 49.
- ⁹⁰ "Public Confidence in Government Officials Handling Foreign Policy," 9 January 1951, Foster Files, box 20. *DSB*, 23 (1950), 839-40.
- ⁹¹ "Summary of Meeting," January 18, 1951, Asst. Secretary of State for PA Files, Records of PRWG, box 1.
- ⁹² Tracy S. Vorhees, "The Committee on the Present Danger," April 1968, Vorhees Papers, Rutgers University; James Hershberg, *James B. Conant* (New York, 1993), 491-514; Jerry W. Sanders, *Peddlers of Crisis* (Boston, 1983), 51-114; Wells, "Sounding the Tocsin," 141-48.
- ⁹³ Ervine J. Button, Memo for Major George, 15 February 1951, box 197, folder 6, Marshall Papers.
- ⁹⁴ See footnote 8 above.
- ⁹⁵ According to PA, this was far from an ideal situation. Indeed, having monitored the impact of the State Department's background briefings, PA concluded that only one broadcaster had actually changed his stance. This was CBS's Eric Severaid, who "may be somewhat quicker to explain the department's position than he was a few months ago." See Russell to Lehrbas, "Examination of Comment by Selected Radio Correspondents," 30 March 1951, Russell Files, subject box 8.
- ⁹⁶ Minutes of the 77th Meeting of the NSC, 4 January 1951. Schwinn to John Ferguson, 5 January 1951, PA, Records Relating to NSC, box 3.
- ⁹⁷ Marshall to Nitze, 25 January 1951; Robert P. Joyce to Nitze, "NSC-100," 24 January 1951; both in PPS Files, Working Papers: War Aims, box 73. Walsh, "Is It Immoral to Strike First If Attack is Imminent?" *Washington Sunday Star*, 24 December 1950. Actually, there was no evidence that CPD leaders did support a preventive war; see Hershberg, *Conant*, 506, 531-33.
- ⁹⁸ *FRUS*, 1951, 1, 7-18; Alsop to Sommers, 15 December 1950, Special Correspondence, box 27, Alsop Papers.

⁹⁹ “U.S. Can Hit Back,” *New York Times*, 1 January 1951; Meeting with Ed Milne, Paul Martin, and Al Warner, 18 January 1951, box 82, Acheson Papers.

¹⁰⁰ “Domestic Public Opinion and the Achievement of National Objectives,” 5 June 1951, PA, National Security Files, subject box 57. “Monthly Survey of American Opinion on International Affairs,” September 1950 and April 1951, Foster Files, box 12

¹⁰¹ Horace H. Smith to McFall, 23 August 1950; Ambassador Jessup, Discussion with Senator Pepper, 24 August 1950; both in Asst. Secretary for Congressional Relations Files, subject box 1.