

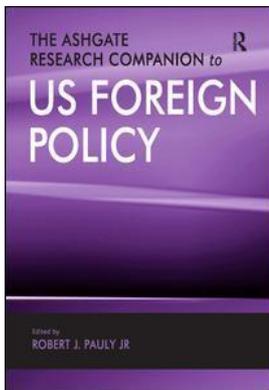
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## **The Ashgate Research Companion to US Foreign Policy**

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### **US Foreign Policy During the Cold War**

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# US Foreign Policy During the Cold War

Robert J. Pauly Jr.

## Introduction

One of the most well known and often challenging periods of American history from a foreign policy perspective was the era driven by the division of the globe into proverbial spheres of influence presided over by the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War. Central to the system was the division of Europe in the aftermath of World War II, with the United States leading the liberal democratic West and the Soviet Union heading the autocratic communist East and the geographic and ideological split locked into place institutionally via the establishment of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and Warsaw Pact, respectively. However, both superpowers had global, as well as European, interests, and each side formulated and implemented its foreign policies accordingly throughout the Cold War, which progressed through its formative stage from 1945–50 and did not come to a conclusion until the collapse of communist governments across Central and Eastern Europe in 1989–90 and the implosion of the Soviet Union itself in December 1991.<sup>1</sup>

Unlike traditional conflicts, particularly violent global confrontations such as World War I and World War II, the struggle between the United States and the Soviet Union and their allies and surrogates was described as a “cold” war precisely because it did not involve direct military conflict between the two sides. Although the United States and the Soviet Union and their respective allies suffered significant casualties as a result of “hot” conflicts such as the Vietnam War of the 1960s and 1970s for the Americans and the battle against the mujahideen resistance of the 1980s in Afghanistan for the Soviets, the superpowers themselves did not wage wars directly against their counterparts. Consequently, the cost in terms of loss of life on the battlefield was markedly lower than either of the aforementioned

1 For an in-depth examination of the history of the Cold War, see John L. Gaddis, *The Cold War: A New History* (New York: Penguin Press, 2005).

global wars. And that was certainly by design from the perspectives of leaders in both Washington and Moscow.

Ideally, American policy makers would have preferred to lead the way in creating a peaceful global order in the aftermath of World War II, one comparable to that espoused by President Woodrow Wilson at the end of World War I but rejected by the French and British in favor of the punitive peace articulated in the 1919 Treaty of Versailles. However, the construction of such a system simply could not occur without the acquiescence, if not complete, cooperation of the Soviet Union, which, predictably, given the ideological differences between the governmental systems administered by Washington and Moscow, was not forthcoming. Consequently, the United States developed a strategy known as containment to manage its relationship with the Soviet Union to whatever possible advantage to the presiding presidential administration in Washington, its citizens and its allies abroad at a particular historical juncture. In short, all of America's presidents during that era, from Harry S. Truman to Ronald Reagan, used some aspects of the strategy of containment, with the assumption that eventually, the US system would prevail over that of the Soviet Union.<sup>2</sup> As John L. Gaddis, America's most accomplished scholar of the Cold War and American national security strategy, explains:

*The idea of containment proceeded from the proposition that if there was not to be one world, then there must not be another world war either. It would be necessary to keep the peace while preserving the balance of power: the gap that had developed during the 1930s between the perceived requirements of peace and power was not to happen again. If geopolitical stability could be restored in Europe, time would work against the Soviet Union and in favor of the Western democracies. Authoritarianism need not be the "wave of the future"; sooner or later even Kremlin authoritarians would realize this fact and change their policies.<sup>3</sup>*

Ultimately, the realization to which Gaddis refers took more than four decades to occur and did not transpire with a geopolitical shove from the Reagan administration during the 1980s and some skillful diplomacy by the George H.W. Bush administration to ensure that the proverbial closing act of the Cold War unfolded in a peaceful fashion.

With these opening observations providing a necessary contextual foundation, the balance of the chapter presents a historical review of the formulation and implementation of US foreign policy during the Cold War era. It does so in the contexts of the following four chronologically organized sections: the origins of

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2 For an authoritative, in-depth examination of America's containment strategies during the Cold War, see John L. Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of American National Security Policy during the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982).

3 John L. Gaddis, *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 37.

the Cold War in the aftermath of World War II, a period managed by the Truman administration from 1945–50; the foreign policies of the Dwight D. Eisenhower, John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson administrations, 1950–69; the foreign policies of the Richard M. Nixon, Gerald R. Ford and James E. Carter administrations, 1969–81; and the foreign policies of the Ronald W. Reagan and George H.W. Bush administrations, 1981–93.

## Origins of the Cold War, 1945–50

In the aftermath of World War II, the Truman administration was presented with both a challenge and an opportunity. The challenge was to reconstruct Western Europe generally and Germany in particular in the aftermath of the twentieth century's most devastating global conflict. The opportunity was to do so in a way that would minimize the potential for the outbreak of a comparable conflagration in the future.

The Truman administration responded by striking a necessary balance between punitive and reconciliatory measures in dealing with defeated Germany and its Western European neighbors. As a means to that end, the United States provided the Western Europeans with the requisite resources to rebuild economically under the auspices of the Marshall Plan in exchange for a pledge to create a set of cooperative intra-European institutions that would include their former German adversaries. The offer of Marshall Plan aid, which was put forward by Secretary of State George Marshall in June 1947, came two months after the president's promulgation of the Truman Doctrine as a means to express solidarity with peoples fighting for freedom and democracy across the globe.

Subsequently, the Americans agreed to maintain a military presence on the continent to guard against potential Soviet expansion and resurgent German power, a promise they formalized by establishing the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in April 1949. Of equal significance was the Truman administration's intervention on the Korean Peninsula in June 1950 after the communist North invaded the democratic South. That invasion was viewed from Washington as a provocation initiated by the Soviet Union, which had carried out its first successful nuclear bomb test the previous summer. By stepping in to defend the South under United Nations (UN) auspices, the United States sent a clear message to Moscow that Soviet expansion of its communist sphere of influence beyond Central and Eastern Europe was unacceptable.

The Truman administration's initiatives in Western Europe in particular were part of a three-pronged approach. First, the administration had to collaborate with its wartime allies in administering punitive measures to the remnants of the Third Reich's leadership for the prosecution of the war crimes generally and the ghastly horrors of the Holocaust that unfolded therein specifically. Second, it had to strike a balance between justice and pragmatism in dismantling the National Socialist Party and disciplining its adherents without unduly hampering either

the reconstruction of the vanquished state's physical and economic infrastructure or the cultivation of democratic values among Germans populating the Western Zones of Occupation. Third, it had to foster a spirit of reconciliation between the Germans under American, British and French occupation and their former enemies across Western Europe in order to consolidate a united transatlantic front in the nascent Cold War pitting the United States against the Soviet Union.

Passing these related tests required the development of policies related to three distinctive undertakings—the 1945–46 Nuremberg Trials, 1945–48 de-Nazification proceedings and 1945–57 transatlantic and inter- and intra-European reconstruction, reindustrialization and integrative institution-building processes. The Nuremberg Trials entailed the prosecution of the principal Nazi war criminals by a multilateral International Military Tribunal (IMT), one that included representatives from each of the victorious World War II powers. Those on trial were prosecuted under the scrutiny of the international media, which ensured global publicity for—and thus enhanced the perceived legitimacy of—the proceedings. Ultimately, the trial resulted in 19 guilty verdicts and three acquittals, with 12 of the defendants sentenced to death by hanging. The de-Nazification process, on the other hand, was designed to punish less high profile defendants than those prosecuted at Nuremberg and also to purge German society of any remnants of National Socialism. Regrettably, de-Nazification proved both arbitrary judicially and impractical logistically. Personal vendettas excluded some former Nazis from playing productive roles in society, while others found themselves in influential positions on the basis of the indispensability of their required skills in moving forward with the reconstruction of Germany's physical and industrial infrastructure. Consequently, the United States chose to discontinue the program in March 1948 so that it could concentrate on the holistic reconstruction and democratization of the Western Zones of Occupation as a counterweight to the emerging Soviet bloc in the East.

The Truman administration extended that consolidation project to the regional level as well. In particular, it used Marshall Plan aid as an inducement to encourage the creation of intra-European institutions (most notably the European Coal and Steel Community [ECSC] in 1952 and the European Economic Community [EEC] in 1957). In addition, it cultivated a common sense of purpose among West Germans and other Western Europeans by breaking the Soviet Union's blockade of Berlin in 1948–49 and guaranteeing a long-term American presence on the continent through the establishment of NATO.

Ultimately, the transformation of Western European identity came in the context of and had a profound impact upon the development and subsequent conduct of a global Cold War pitting the United States against the Soviet Union over a period lasting more than four decades. As Walter Laqueur notes, the “old European balance of power was replaced by the global balance of power between America and Russia. Europe paid a terrible price for its disunity: the division into so many

nation-states with conflicting intensity. The fate of the continent was now being decided in Moscow and Washington."<sup>4</sup>

In order to prevent Soviet advances beyond Moscow's control of the Eastern slab of Germany and the states of Central and Eastern Europe, the United States needed the support of a cohesive Western Europe. The creation of such an entity would entail economic, political and military cooperation and thus the willingness of Western Europeans to overcome bitter inter-state animosities, particularly with respect to the Germans. For their part, the Western Europeans required economic assistance for the reconstruction that would necessarily precede the process of reconciliation.<sup>5</sup> As Simon Serfaty argues, "[u]nity among the nation-states of Europe was a precondition for economic reconstruction not from one but two world wars; reconstruction was also the precondition for political unity not only within each European nation-state but among all of them as well. Without reconstruction first, the states of Europe could be saved neither from themselves nor from each other. Reconciliation would come next."<sup>6</sup>

American support for Western European reconstruction, which was manifested in the provision of more than \$12 billion in economic assistance through the Marshall Plan between 1948 and 1952, was part of a multi-step bargaining process between the United States and its allies across the Atlantic. First, the Truman administration proposed and the Western Europeans accepted the Marshall Plan in exchange for a pledge to administer the aid multilaterally as the first step in a long-term regional integration project. Second, the Western Europeans requested that the United States maintain a long-term military presence on the continent in order to mitigate, if not eliminate, any security threats posed by their Soviet adversaries and recently reformed but still innately distrusted German partners. Third, Washington complied by establishing NATO, with the guarantee of collective defense serving as a proverbial security blanket under the cover of which the Western Europeans could deepen and widen the integration process in the future.<sup>7</sup>

These agreements were necessarily connected, each serving to reinforce transatlantic and inter- and intra-European linkages at the intergovernmental level and change popular perceptions of past foes domestically. Serfaty, for example, explains that postwar

*European policies were guided by complementary goals; to foster a peaceful community of democratic states on the continent and to build a strong security*

4 Walter Laqueur, *Europe in Our Time: A History, 1945–1992* (New York: Penguin, 1992), 21.

5 William Wallace, *The Transformation of Western Europe* (Hampshire, UK: Thomson Learning, 1991), 28–34.

6 Simon Serfaty, *Stay the Course: European Unity and Atlantic Solidarity* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1997), 53.

7 Paul Graham Taylor, *The European Union in the 1990s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 8–57; Dusan Sijdanski, *The Federal Future of Europe: From the European Community to the European Union* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), 7–25.

*alliance with the United States. ... Both sides of the Atlantic understood that neither goal could be achieved without the other. Europe's will to unite had to be credible before the United States would accept the European "invitation" to make an unprecedented peacetime commitment to the continent.*<sup>8</sup>

After the distribution of Marshall Plan aid sparked the start of economic recovery, Western European leaders took their initial step in the direction of eventual political unity by founding the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) in April 1951. It included six members—France, West Germany, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg—which would henceforth produce and administer the subsequent distribution of coal and steel collectively rather than unilaterally. Next, at the behest of the United States, they attempted to extend inter-European cooperation to the security field through the development of an independent European Defense Community (EDC)—one lacking, that is, military contributions and political control from Washington. Ultimately rejected by the French Parliament in August 1954, the EDC was stillborn in large part because of concerns over the rearmament of West Germany in an entity lacking an American security component (the Federal Republic was admitted instead to NATO in April 1955). Lastly, the Western Europeans relaunched the integration process by deepening economic cooperation through the establishment of the European Economic Community (EEC) via the Treaty of Rome in June 1957. This ensured that integration continued despite the failure of the EDC.<sup>9</sup>

These institutional developments—both positive and negative—were the product of an underlying safety mechanism that allows transitory delays in the deepening and widening of European institutions but precludes the derailment of the integration process and thus ensures that it continues to progress. Put simply, when integration slows because of shortcomings in a particular context—economic, military or political in general terms—it is relaunched in another. This proved true during Cold War years and remains so in the post-Cold War era. Serfaty, for instance, explains, that the

*process of European unity can most clearly be viewed, and, hence, be taken most seriously, from a multiyear perspective that escapes the day-to-day disappointments of incomplete agreements and unfulfilled promises. Considered at any one time, and examined in the light of any one issue, "Europe" can be legitimately dismissed as a failure. ... But seen in the light of what has already been achieved, the gloom of the moment fades as it becomes all too clear that no setback on the path to unity has ever been final.*<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Serfaty, *Stay the Course*, 52.

<sup>9</sup> A.H. Robertson, *European Institutions: Cooperation, Integration, Unification* (London: Stevens and Sons, 1959), 1–117; Wallace, *The Transformation of Western Europe*, 28–45.

<sup>10</sup> Serfaty, *Taking Europe Seriously* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), 59.

Over the initial four and one-half decades that followed the conclusion of World War II, the transitory successes, failures and—ultimately—progress in the Western European integration process came against the backdrop of an ongoing confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union that had the potential, if only rarely the practical likelihood, to threaten the continent's very existence. In this atmosphere, the Western Europeans steadily deepened and widened their communal economic and political institutions but always did so while facing a Soviet threat that required American power and leadership to hold at bay. The end of the Cold War, by contrast, gave Western European leaders a window of opportunity to focus primarily, if not fully, on cooperation in pursuit of integration within rather than the preclusion of security threats from without. As Serfaty concludes, the “new global war and the new local conflicts that loom ahead are being waged not between states and over boundaries, but within each state and over whatever remains of its territorial sovereignty. ... This, alas, is a farewell to the visions and leaders of yesteryear. Ambitions have take precedence over convictions, and the will to succeed now, at this time, has replaced the urge to build over time.”<sup>11</sup>

### **Eisenhower, Kennedy and Johnson Administrations, 1950–69**

During the course of the Cold War, American presidents used a variety of military and non-military means to further US interests relative to those of the Soviet Union. Understandably, those measures were conditioned by American capabilities and the characteristics of the domestic and international political environments at a particular temporal juncture. For Eisenhower, the Supreme Allied Commander in Europe during World War II, the first order of business upon commencing his initial term in office in January 1953 was to bring the Korean War, which had cost the United States more than 50,000 lives, to a close as expeditiously as possible. He accomplished that objective in June 1953, although America maintained a troop presence along the demarcation line between North and South Korea that remains in place today. Given the costs of the conflict in Korea, Eisenhower was determined to pursue a containment strategy that was considerably less draining on US military resources, an approach known as the “New Look.”<sup>12</sup>

The New Look featured four related components: maintenance of the requisite domestic economic strength to carry out American foreign policy initiatives; reliance on nuclear weapons rather than conventional military power to contain Soviet advances around the world; using covert action by the Central Intelligence

11 Serfaty, *Memories of Europe's Future: Farewell to Yesteryear* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies Press, 1999), 6.

12 For an in-depth examination of the Eisenhower administration's foreign policy, see Richard A. Melanson and David Mayers, ed., *Reevaluating Eisenhower: American Foreign Policy in the Fifties* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1989).

Agency (CIA) to prevent the emergence of developing world governments supportive of Moscow such as the elimination of such regimes in Iran in August 1953 and in Guatemala in June 1954; and, lastly, to strengthen present alliances and seek support from then non-aligned governments against the communists. Rhetorically, the Eisenhower administration also encouraged those under Soviet rule in Central and Eastern Europe to rebel, but proved unwilling to provide any practical assistance for those who did, such as the democracy advocates whose movement was crushed by Moscow in October 1956. The geopolitical pragmatism it exhibited in failing to support the Hungarian Revolution was paralleled by its refusal to support a combined British, French and Israeli initiative to seize the Suez Canal in November 1956. That initiative was likely to force an escalation in US-Soviet tensions that Eisenhower was unwilling to permit.<sup>13</sup>

Eisenhower's successor, President John F. Kennedy, faced Cold War challenges across the globe, ranging from the Soviet construction of the "Berlin Wall" separating communist East Berlin and democratic West Berlin in the heart of Europe in August 1961 to the Cuban Missile Crisis just off America's southern coast in October 1962.

The stiffest test Kennedy faced during his presidency came in the context of the latter imbroglio, when American reconnaissance photos revealed an ongoing Soviet initiative to install nuclear-tipped missiles on the island of Cuba with the acquiescence, if not at the behest of, the communist dictator Fidel Castro. After considering a range of options that included a preemptive military invasion of Cuba to remove those missiles that had already arrived, Kennedy decided to impose a naval blockade of the island, which could technically be deemed an act of war under international law. Ultimately, Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev backed down and removed the missiles from Cuba.<sup>14</sup> Kennedy's action in that case prevented the Soviet Union from increasing markedly the threats it already posed to the continental United States and did so before the missiles were fully operational and the potential for their use was imminent. It was also illustrative of the fact that any administration typically has a range of preventative means at its disposal when required to deal with the escalation of an existing threat to its interests or the sudden emergence of a new one.

Kennedy, who was assassinated in Dallas in November 1963, also focused on confronting the Soviet Union in the developing world through economic, military and political initiatives, including the establishment of the Peace Corps on one hand and dispatching military advisors to South Vietnam in an attempt to prevent a takeover of that state by the communist North. The administration of President Johnson, who succeeded Kennedy, was consumed nearly from its outset by the escalating US presence in Vietnam. Initial intervention and then escalation

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13 "Dwight D. Eisenhower, Foreign Affairs," *University of Virginia Miller Center for Public Affairs American President Online Reference Resource*, online at <http://millercenter.org/academic/americanpresident/eisenhower/essays/biography/5>.

14 For an in-depth examination of the Cuban missile crisis from one of those directly involved at the time, see Robert F. Kennedy, *Thirteen Days: A Memoir of the Cuban Missile Crisis* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1969).

in Vietnam were driven by concerns among American policy makers that if the communists prevailed in that state, democracies across Southeast Asia would fall and give the Soviets a clear advantage relative to the United States in that region. Consequently, the American force presence rose from several thousand military advisors in 1962 to more than 20,000 in April 1965 to 175,000 by November of that year, 275,000 by the end of 1966 and 535,000 by the end of Johnson's presidency in January 1969. As the number of American dead and injured as a result of military operations in Vietnam rose precipitously, the war grew increasingly unpopular among the US population and eventually brought Johnson's time in office to a disappointing conclusion with his decision not to run for re-election in 1968.<sup>15</sup> Above all, it was the unpopularity of the conflict among the American people who had generally demonstrated little interest in US foreign policy in the past that led to Johnson's demise. As Gaddis notes, "With the Vietnam War, the line between what was allowed overseas and what was permitted at home disappeared altogether. The Johnson administration found it impossible to plan and prosecute the war without repeatedly concealing its intentions from the American people, and yet the decisions it made profoundly affected the American people."<sup>16</sup>

## Nixon, Ford and Carter Administrations, 1969–81

The history of the Cold War was defined by low and high points from the perspectives of both the United States and the Soviet Union, which were characterized in terms of the extent of relative power and influence of each side at the global level. Put simply, for the United States, the 1970s were clearly a low point as the Nixon, Ford and Carter administrations struggled to restore America to a stronger relative position during the closing stage and aftermath of the Vietnam War. Yet, as was true throughout the Cold War, each of these administrations handled the geopolitical cards it was dealt in subtly, if not markedly, different ways. Their approaches ranged from Nixon's use of diplomacy in an attempt to drive a wedge between the two most powerful communist states in the world—the Soviet Union and China—to Ford's maintenance of the status quo (albeit one that still favored Moscow) as the United States attempted to recover from the domestic repercussions of the Watergate affair that culminated in Nixon's resignation to Carter's shift to an emphasis on global human rights over the bipolar relationship.<sup>17</sup>

15 "Lyndon B. Johnson, Foreign Affairs," *University of Virginia Miller Center for Public Affairs American President Online Reference Resource*, online at <http://millercenter.org/academic/americanpresident/lbjohnson/essays/biography/5>.

16 Gaddis, *Cold War: A New History*, 171.

17 For in-depth examinations of the foreign policies of the Nixon, Ford and Carter administrations, see Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994), 674–761 and Scott Kaufman, *Plans Unraveled: The Foreign Policy of the Carter Administration* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2008).

Nixon inherited a daunting yet necessary task from Johnson: to bring the Vietnam War to a close while limiting the damage to the US position relative to that of the Soviet Union in the Cold War. Nixon embraced this challenge with significant assistance from his national security advisor, Henry Kissinger, who also served as secretary of state beginning in 1973 and continued to hold both positions under Ford. While conducting negotiations with the North Vietnamese regime in Paris and concurrently reducing its forces in Vietnam, the Nixon administration also moved forward with diplomatic overtures designed to open a relationship with China. Secret visits by Kissinger to China in 1971 paved the path to a formal meeting between Nixon and Chinese communist leader Mao Zedong in February 1972 in Shanghai. That meeting was followed by a diplomatic warming in US-Soviet relations lest Moscow risk Washington drawing any closer to Beijing and the successful negotiation of a ceasefire in the Vietnam War in January 1973. Ultimately, these diplomatic initiatives were left to Ford to manage with Kissinger's help following Nixon's resignation in August 1974. With respect to the US-Chinese opening in particular, Kissinger explains:

*The Shanghai Communiqué and the diplomacy leading up to it allowed the Nixon administration to put in place what it called, perhaps somewhat grandiloquently, a new structure of peace. As soon as America's opening to China was announced, the pattern of international relations changed dramatically. Later on, relations with China were referred to in the West as the China "card," as if the policy of the tough leaders who ruled from the Forbidden City could be designed in Washington. In fact, the China "card" either played itself or it did not exist. The role of American policy was to establish a framework that reflected each nation's willingness to support the other where national interest coincided.*<sup>18</sup>

As opposed to Nixon and Ford, who sought to advance American interests to the extent possible through diplomacy during a period of relative US decline as the Vietnam War came to a close, Carter was determined to cast universal human rights as the centerpiece of the American foreign policy agenda. While noble, Carter's approach was a naïve one in a Cold War environment in which the Soviet Union saw an opening to further its own interests, especially in the developing world. Although Carter achieved one notable success in mediating the negotiation of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Israel and Egypt through the Camp David Peace Accords in September 1978, that relative breakthrough was overshadowed by the seizure of the American Embassy in Tehran amidst the outbreak of an Islamic Revolution against the US-supported regime of the Shah Muhammad Reza Pahlavi in Iran in November 1979 and the Soviet invasion and occupation of Afghanistan a month later. The combination of these latter events, particularly his inability to secure the release of the hostages in Iran, resulted in his

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<sup>18</sup> Kissinger, *Diplomacy*, 729.

defeat to Reagan in the November 1980 presidential election and the start of the final stage of the Cold War.<sup>19</sup>

## Reagan and Bush Administrations, 1981–93

Similar to Kennedy, President Reagan took a proactive stance in US-Soviet relations and he did so in the aftermath of Moscow's most aggressive foreign policy initiative since the 1962 episode in Cuba — its invasion of Afghanistan on the eve of the start of the 1980 presidential race in December 1979. After defeating Carter in the ensuing election, Reagan crafted and implemented a strategy that sought to confront the Soviet Union and “roll back” its global influence through two means. First, the Reagan administration engaged in a massive military buildup that included the proposed development of a Strategic Defense Initiative to safeguard the United States against the threat of Soviet intercontinental missiles via space-based lasers. Second, it challenged Moscow by supporting insurgencies fighting Soviet-backed regimes in developing world states ranging from Afghanistan to Nicaragua and spent much less money than the Soviet Union in the process. Collectively, these initiatives helped to convince Gorbachev that the Soviets could no longer compete with the United States in terms of either economic vitality — and related conventional military reach — or political influence. As a result, Moscow gradually reduced its control over the Warsaw Pact, which led to the proverbial closing act of the Cold War, one that was managed by the George H.W. Bush administration from 1989–1992 and left the Clinton administration facing a new set of threats over the balance of the 1990s.<sup>20</sup>

Put simply, Reagan recognized that he could prevent unnecessary American — and, for that matter, Central and Eastern European — sacrifices, whether in terms of military outlays or the limitation of economic opportunity and political freedom over the long term through the implementation of a range of proactive (and, to some extent, preemptive) policies in the short term. As Max Boot, a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, asserts, “Ronald Reagan waged political, economic, and moral warfare on the ‘evil empire,’ and even sponsored proxy wars, but he prudently refrained from direct military attacks. His is a preemptive strategy we can and should apply around the world today.”<sup>21</sup>

With respect to the conduct of foreign policy, all American presidential administrations must manage transitions upon assuming office. The challenges

19 “James E. Carter, Foreign Affairs,” *University of Virginia Miller Center for Public Affairs American President Online Reference Resource*, online at <http://millercenter.org/academic/americanpresident/carter/essays/biography/5>.

20 For a detailed examination of the Reagan Doctrine, see Mark P. Lagon, *The Reagan Doctrine: The Sources of American Conduct in the Cold War's Last Chapter* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1994).

21 Max Boot, “The Bush Doctrine Lives,” *The Weekly Standard* (16 February 2004), 25.

of such transitions are typically conditioned by changes that reflect the political affiliations and worldviews of a given president and his advisors and the degrees of continuity and change prevalent in the international system at a particular temporal juncture. Over the course of the Cold War, most of those challenges were similar in character in that they grew out of the confrontation pitting the United States against the Soviet Union. Between 1945 and 1988, for example, those two states' relative power fluctuated regularly, but the bipolar structure of the global system remained relatively unchanged. When George H.W. Bush began his tenure as president in January 1989, however, the system itself was on the brink of a fundamental change. The geopolitical transformation that ensued was the result of the collapse of Moscow's communist empire and the implosion of the Soviet Union itself between 1989 and 1991. Those developments, in turn, left the United States as the world's lone superpower.

For its part, the Bush administration had to preside over both what proved to be the proverbial final act of the Cold War in the heart of Europe and, concomitantly, to plan and prosecute America's first major "hot" conflict in the strategically vital Persian Gulf. The former demanded the diplomatic orchestration of Moscow's surrender of political influence on the European continent in 1989–90. The latter entailed the construction of a coalition of states (including the Soviet Union) to oppose Iraqi President Saddam Hussein's invasion and occupation of neighboring Kuwait in 1990 and then support the subsequent expulsion of Baghdad's forces through the prosecution of the Persian Gulf War in 1991.

Those two sets of events were directly related. Ultimately, the manner in which Bush oversaw the conclusion of the Cold War through the collapse of communist regimes across Central and Eastern Europe in the fall and winter of 1989–90 and the unification of Germany in October 1990 set the stage for his administration's management of the Persian Gulf Crisis for two reasons.<sup>22</sup> First, the administration's diplomacy in orchestrating the unification process helped solidify individual and governmental relationships with states both within and outside of NATO, many of which joined the coalition in the war against Iraq. Second, its management of the closing stage of the Cold War provided valuable experience with respect to the ways to maintain domestic and international cohesion when handling complex—and, to a large extent, unprecedented—events.

Within months of taking office, Bush had a unique opportunity to orchestrate the end of the 45-year bipolar confrontation with the Soviet Union. The policies of the preceding Reagan administration (in which Bush served as vice president)—most notably a massive defense buildup, including the pursuit of a space-based

22 For more detailed analyses of the collapse of communist rule in Central and Eastern Europe in 1989–90 and the German unification process in 1990, see Robert L. Hutchings, *American Diplomacy and the End of the Cold War: An Insider's Account of US Policy in Europe, 1989–1992* (Washington: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1997), Elizabeth Pond, *Beyond the Wall: Germany's Road to Unification* (Washington: Brookings Institution, 1993) and Philip Zelikow and Condoleezza Rice, *Germany Unified and Europe Transformed: A Study in Statecraft* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995).

anti-ballistic missile system, and support for revolutionary groups fighting to overthrow regimes backed by Moscow in the developing world—forced Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev to recognize the innate economic and political flaws in the communist system.<sup>23</sup> Gorbachev responded with promises to enact domestic reforms and release the Soviet Union's iron grip on the member states of the Warsaw Pact, leaving the Bush team to formulate and pursue policies that would encourage the Kremlin to back its rhetoric with substantive action. Bush faced a daunting challenge in dealing with an economically and politically moribund but not militarily defeated Soviet state. Fortunately, he was not entirely bereft of historical guidance on how best to proceed. The post-World War I and -World War II settlements and their legacies of instability and stability, respectively, served as testaments both to the imprudence of humiliating a defeated state and the indispensability of American leadership in Europe and the world.

Sensibly, the Bush administration heeded past mistakes in responding to present realities. Bush recognized that the United States was the only state with the requisite political, economic and military power to manage the political reconfiguration of Central and Eastern Europe and subsequent German unification process in a manner that would take into account if not serve fully the interests of all the continent's major players. Consequently, Bush and his advisors followed three rules in formulating their transatlantic policies. First, they were firm yet prudent in dealing with the Soviet Union, pressing Gorbachev to accede to American demands without creating a perception that Moscow's security concerns had not been taken into account. Second, they also exhibited the requisite leadership to secure NATO support for his initiatives. While the United States had the final word, it did not act without consulting its allies first. Third, they gave primacy to the Washington-Bonn axis in 1989, calling for an end to the division of Germany and providing the necessary diplomatic support to ensure that the 1990 unification process proceeded under American auspices.

Bush convinced Gorbachev he could trust the United States by taking care not to humiliate the Soviet Union publicly when the Warsaw Pact collapsed. Less than a month after the fall of the Berlin Wall, Bush expressed unambiguous American support for German unification at the December 1989 Malta Summit, but he also promised Gorbachev not to further undermine his counterpart's tenuous domestic political position so long as the Soviet Union did not crack down militarily in the Baltics. Bush's treatment of Gorbachev was pragmatic. He was convinced he could count on cooperation from Gorbachev in achieving German unification on terms favorable to the United States. If Gorbachev were replaced by a communist hard-liner, such cooperation would no longer be possible. Thus, Bush accommodated Gorbachev when it was possible to do so without compromising American interests in Europe.

<sup>23</sup> For in-depth analyses of these approaches, see Lagon, *The Reagan Doctrine*; and Michael Turner, "Defence Policy and Arms Control: The Reagan Record," in John R. Lees and Turner, eds, *Reagan's First Four Years: A New Beginning?* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988).

The Bush administration's construction of an inclusive framework—the “two-plus-four”—to facilitate German unification was masterful. The two-plus-four, which consisted of East and West Germany, as well as the United States, Soviet Union, United Kingdom and France, was an effective means to address the concerns of all the principals involved in the process. It also enabled the United States to retain a predominant role in global affairs in general and on the continent in particular. Essentially, the framework served at least some of the interests of each of the states it included, a design that also proved effective during the Persian Gulf crisis. First, it gave the Germans the right to address internal issues—most notably economic and political integration—without interference from outside parties. Second, it gave the British, French and Soviets seats at the negotiating table. Thus, all three had an opportunity to raise their security concerns with respect to the future course of a previously united Germany they held responsible for the death and destruction associated with World War I and World War II. Third, it allowed the United States to orchestrate the proceedings in three capacities—as the bipolar counterpart to the Soviet Union, the head of the alliance and West Germany's partner.

Through its role in the two-plus-four process, the Bush administration achieved the one objective it deemed indispensable to European stability and security: inclusion of the reunited Germany in NATO. The United States was the only actor in a position to extract the concessions from NATO and West Germany necessary to secure Soviet accession to membership for the reconstituted Germany in the alliance. Bush did so by offering Gorbachev “nine assurances” that mitigated the threats the Kremlin felt NATO and Germany posed to the Soviet Union.

Bush's assurances were a product of coordination between Washington and Bonn as well as transatlantic consultation and cooperation. The American-brokered NATO Summit declaration in June 1990 in London helped bolster Gorbachev's domestic political position at the concurrent 28th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.<sup>24</sup> Chancellor Helmut Kohl's promises to limit Germany's military capacity and offers of economic incentives to the Soviet Union—coordinated with Bush—were the final pieces of the unification puzzle.<sup>25</sup> Acknowledging these accommodations, Gorbachev acceded to German unification on American terms. Bush's approach was instructive in two respects. First, it validated the position of the United States as an indispensable player in the European and international systems. Second, it illustrated the efficacy of cooperation as opposed to confrontation in the settlement of global conflicts. However, it did not preclude the potential for future flare-ups of military violence in other regions of the world. In October 1990, East and West Germany were unified once again, bringing the European component of

24 James A. Baker, III, with Thomas M. DeFrank, *The Politics of Diplomacy: Revolution, War and Peace, 1989–1992* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1995), 251; Hutchings, *American Diplomacy*, 129.

25 “London Declaration on a Transformed North Atlantic Alliance, Issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in London on 5–6 July 1990,” *NATO Press Service*, Communiqué S-I (90) 36, 6 July 1990. Reference made in Hutchings, *American Diplomacy*, 135.

the bipolar confrontation to a conclusion. In December 1991, the Soviet Union itself was dissolved, signaling the formal end of the Cold War.

## Conclusions

This chapter was designed to present an incisive review of the formulation and implementation of US foreign policies during the Cold War. It did so through the presentation of four related sections. First, it examined the origins of the Cold War in the aftermath of World War II, a period managed quite effectively by the Truman administration. Between 1945 and 1950 in particular, Truman and his foreign policy team essentially locked the Cold War into place by committing the United States to the economic and political stability of Western Europe through the dispensation of Marshall Plan aid and establishment of NATO and intervening in Korea to preclude further Soviet advancement beyond Central and Eastern Europe. Second, it examined the foreign policies of the Eisenhower, Kennedy and Johnson administrations, emphasizing the shift from Eisenhower's New Look to the descent into the quagmire of Vietnam under Kennedy and, to a much larger extent, Johnson. Third, it examined the foreign policies of the Nixon, Ford and Carter administrations, focusing on Nixon's and Ford's efforts to manage US-Soviet relations to America's advantage diplomatically and Carter's noble but naïve human rights agenda. Fourth, it examined the foreign policies of the Reagan and Bush administrations as the former pushed the Soviet Union to the edge of defeat and the latter skillfully managed the re-democratization of Central and Eastern Europe and the unification of Germany.

Above all, the examination of US approaches to the containment of the Soviet Union between the 1950s and 1970s and eventual rollback of Moscow's power and influence across the world in the 1980s demonstrated the importance of patience and pragmatism in pursuing American interests. It was particularly important that the United States remain committed to the principles that led it to commit itself to the struggle against the Soviet Union within—and, of course, far beyond—the heart of Europe in the aftermath of World War II. Ultimately, it retained that commitment to the eventual establishment of a Europe whole and free—and a broader world in which democracy prevailed over autocracy throughout periods of rising and falling American foreign fortunes. In the end, the United States was left as a lone superpower as the world entered the post-Cold War era.

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