

making very few intelligent statements on foreign policy. Even General Eisenhower was given to vacant statements like "Nothing guides Russian policy so much as a desire for friendship with the United States." Imagine what less realistic persons were saying!

Though Americans in 1939 had indicated in opinion polls that if forced to choose between fascism and communism they would prefer the former, by 1942 they had reversed their positions, and influential elements of the American press were actually leading cheers for the Soviet way of life. *Life* magazine proclaimed Lenin "perhaps the greatest man of modern times," and jabbered on that "the Russians are one hell of a people... (who) to a remarkable degree... look like Americans, dress like Americans and think like Americans." True, a section of the American people remained skeptical of communist Russia, and some had even tempered their expectations for the postwar period. But the more educated and influential Americans remained enthusiastic about Russia's willingness to promote the ideals of the Atlantic Charter. With such enthusiasms loose in the land, with imperious politicians and advisers of the Roosevelt administrations often contemptuous, Truman, the only American president in this century without a college education, tried to guide America through the last months of World War II and into the postwar era.

In July, 1945, he went to Potsdam and tried to fill FDR's position between the two remaining giants of the Grand Alliance, Winston Churchill and Joseph Stalin. In the midst of the meeting the British snatched Churchill from his side and Truman was left with Attlee to confront the serpentine Soviet dictator. Their worlds were as wide apart as can be imagined. What democracy and freedom meant to Truman must have been incomprehensible to a tyrant like Stalin, so given to paranoia and treachery. We can only speculate about how many of their difficulties were born of guile and how many were born of the insurmountable misunderstandings of two men cultured in two diametrically opposed poli-

tical philosophies. Just before the Potsdam meetings America perfected the atomic bomb, and Truman had to decide how to go about prudently informing Stalin of it and of its significance to the war. During all of this time Truman was trapped in the ambiguous grasp of past commitments and policies made by his predecessor. At this time FDR had been making vague commitments, and his policies may have been in a state of flux. At any rate his propensity for loose administration and procrastination would have left American foreign policy in somewhat of a mess even if his premises had been well-founded and congruent with Russian strategic interests, which they were not.

Steadily the war ended. After balancing the costs and benefits of using America's terrible new weapon, Truman chose to end the war quickly. Two bombs were dropped and the Japanese sued for peace. By now Truman was gaining a realistic perception of Russian intentions, but his realism was not shared by many of his fellow citizens. Before he could implement a policy of firmness for dealing with the rapacious communists, another old enthusiasm rushed through the American people — the enthusiasm for peacetime jubilation, then "normalcy." It was a re-enactment of the frivolous period following World War I. A chorus went up to "bring the boys home." Military appropriations were slashed, and Americans either showed no interest in their world responsibilities or maundered on delusively about the United Nations.

The precipitous American withdrawal and disarmament encouraged Soviet expansion. The Soviets had not been very cooperative at Yalta and were even less cooperative at Potsdam. As 1945 faded into 1946, they became obdurate. They would not sign treaties, repatriate prisoners of war, or show any interest in relieving the devastated areas of Europe. To the contrary, their interest was in reparations. Through it all Truman had to contend at home with the men of enthusiasms: enthusiasm for our noble Russian allies, who were not very genial

anymore; enthusiasm for world trade, international organization, and self-determination for all nations. All were unrealistic notions. And then there was this new enthusiasm at home, an enthusiasm for ambrosia. It came at a time in which resolutions and farsightedness were necessary to assure world peace and a measure of freedom for war-torn Europe.

Churchill soon was describing Europe as "a rubble heap, a charnel house, a breeding ground of pestilence and hate." Many of the ravaged nations were without the essentials of life and were incapable of providing them. The situation was desperate. In Eastern Europe the democracies drifted imperceptibly into communist tyranny. First the ministry of the interior would come under Red domination. Then allegations of impropriety would be directed at the other branches of government. Then chaos, and finally Red dominance.

It was not until 1946 and 1947 that Americans became sufficiently aware of Russian truculence to support a sensible policy against it. During this time the average man from Independence, Missouri had his arms full trying to run the government. It is important to grasp the political and intellectual problems that hobble a politician during such times. Respect and prestige are essential if a man is to govern. After the glamorous Roosevelt it was very hard to respect a simple man like Truman. Many politicians sniffed at the thought that Truman would do more than fill out FDR's term. They began challenging him almost immediately. Many Roosevelt advisers suspected Truman's competence. Truman made some minor and expected errors, and his Secretary of State, James F. Byrnes, was callow and in other ways unacceptable.

Most Americans wanted to "get out of" Asia and Europe. Not many people knew what the Russians were up to and few appreciated the difficulty of ending a world war. It was a time of pother. Somehow Truman managed. He sweated away earnestly and energetically. He replaced Byrnes with a very sound Secretary of State, George C. Marshall, and he followed Marshall's counsel. As President he asserted himself as a confident leader determined to do his duty. He intended to be elected in 1948 and he manifested his seriousness by launching new policies that were singular and intelligent.

In reviewing his foreign policy achievement, one cannot help but note the mark of his strong character. His proposals were a dramatic departure from the past. He ended Japanese hostilities by ordering use of the atomic bomb. During his first administration a policy of prudent containment was outlined and given definition in the Truman Doctrine, which made it "the policy of the United States to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures." Enunciated on March 12, 1947, it directed economic and military aid to Greece and Turkey, lest they fall into communist hands. It initially cost four hundred million dollars, and was a bold *démarche*.

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Aid to Greece and Turkey was only a precursor to the Marshall Plan which funded the resurrection of modern Europe and cost \$13,348,800,000. Truman was also responsible for the Point Four program, a kind of world-wide equivalent of the Marshall Plan. Under his leadership Germany was rescued from a "cigarette economy," and recovered rapidly. By reforming the German currency and seeking to revive the prostrate nation Truman triggered the most belligerent Russian threat yet, the Berlin Blockade. But if the Russians thought they could panic or daunt him, they had misperceived him, for with typical resolve he ordered the U.S. Air Force to transport supplies into the city, and he began marshalling what was to become the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. When two years later aggressive communism struck at the opposite corner of the world. Truman answered Russia's North Korean epigones with an American army and United Nations support. It is true that during this period the forces of freedom suffered setbacks in China, and the Russian presence in Eastern Europe was not dented. But no American president is given a magic wand, and even without considering his foreign policy failures, or his difficult domestic political circumstances, Truman's accomplishments in international affairs seem breath taking.

Robert H. Ferrell

## Truman Foreign Policy: A Traditionalist View

*In this issue appears the first part of a two-part article examining the Cold War revisionists and Truman foreign policy.*

In the early 1960s a well-known student of American history, the late John L. Snell, published an article in the *American Historical Review* in which he dealt with several books on the origins of the cold war, and after criticizing two of them severely he issued a call for historians to turn their attention to that part of the recent past and write about it in the best traditions of their discipline.<sup>1</sup> Little could he have imagined that in the next years some very able young historians just out of graduate school together with a young student of English literature, a disillusioned foreign service officer, a linguist, and a few other individuals would take the views which Snell and his contemporaries had advanced about American-Russian relations in 1945 and thereafter and stand them on their heads. Soon there would be a sizable literature on the origins of the cold war, it would find enthusiastic acceptance among college and university students throughout the country, and it would describe Snell and his aging colleagues as traditionalists, their historical opinions as received truths, and their conclusions as cold war rhetoric.

Consider the ideas about the origins of the cold war that were being proposed

He was a truly unpretentious president. But what he lacked in formal intellectual training he more than made up for in character. His integrity was unshakable. He was brave, prudent, disciplined, and deliberate in making decisions. He had idealism enough, and his resources of common sense served him well — especially when so many of his advisers were panting through the White House full of the most foolish enthusiasms. So he had many of the attributes of a great leader as well as many of the endearing qualities of a first-rate character.

His weakness for partisanship was perhaps unavoidable, but it did flaw his service to his country. Perhaps the political problems of his presidency prevented the mastery of events that might have marked a less partisan administration. Constant and unrestrained political struggles within a democracy must have a corrosive effect on the social fabric. In dealing with them Truman showed little restraint or magnanimity. His *Memoirs* abound with spiteful references to opponents. And it does not strike me as a flight of fancy to draw a nexus from his kind of wanton partisanship to the politics being inflicted upon America today by the New Left. This is hardly to blame Truman for the vagaries of the New Left, but to suggest that politics must have some influence on civility.

Truman's penchant for ripping and snorting might have been the only way he could summon Americans to his generally wise policies, but as with so many other things, it was not without cost.

History is not a very neat story. Those who attempt to plot it according to some preordained ideological theory write bad history. To make ideological claims about Truman's intentions is foolish. Truman was a very fine president whose achievement is all the greater because of the predicament from which he started. There are few presidents in this century who have matched his performance and none of his successors is comparable — though Mr. Nixon still might make the grade. Truman's policies saved much of the world from communist domination and left it with a bit more peace than might have been expected. At times during his presidency he was an appallingly unpopular man. Perhaps because of his unpretentious origins he did not worry much about popularity, but rather worried about performing his duty to his country and to his God, for he was a religious man. Before he died, he said something to his daughter that should renew our faith in that democratic ideal, for though it was right in an uncomplicated way, it also had a touch of the numinous to it. He said, "Do your duty and history will do you justice." Now it has. □

in the early 1970s — what a difference from the views of a decade before! So-called revisionist historians were writing that President Franklin D. Roosevelt's subtle treatment of the Soviet Union had been reversed by his successor Harry S. Truman who saw foreign affairs as a checker game instead of the chess game it really was. That the American government under Truman's direction had tried to oust the Soviet Union from Eastern Europe, giving little or no attention to Russia's security needs in an area close to Soviet borders. That to get the attention of the Russians the Americans dropped two atomic bombs on the Japanese. That they sought to keep Russian attention on the American atomic monopoly, and largely for such a purpose advanced a system of international control of atomic weapons, the Baruch Plan, which was almost bound to fail. Meanwhile the United States government used every economic weapon at hand, such as cutting off lend lease to the USSR, reneging on the reparations agreements concluded at the end of the war, and refusing to consider seriously the pressing Russian need for a postwar loan. Then early in 1946 the Americans seized upon an admitted Soviet slowness to get out of northern Iran and virtually forced the Russians out, in a public confrontation at the United Nations. The next year, 1947, marked a rapid development of American-Russian antagonism, for President Truman intervened in the Greek civil war with

the Truman Doctrine, and in order to gain support scared hell out of the country, to use a phrase attributed to Senator Arthur H. Vandenberg. (Somewhat later, beginning in 1950, the administration would get what it deserved for this tactic, at the hands of a senator who took a free ride on the anti-communist bandwagon.) The Truman Doctrine inspired the administration to sponsor the Marshall Plan, a program worthy in itself but which had the unfortunate effect of dividing Europe; the President, the revisionists believe, probably had this divisive effect in mind from the outset, as in his memoirs he described the Truman Doctrine and Marshall Plan as being two halves of the same walnut. All the while, through a series of careful moves, the administration was creating a new state in Europe, West Germany, for the purpose of enlisting German industry and eventually a German army to protect the free world against world communism. By the early 1970s the revisionists had begun to turn to American postwar policies in the Far East, and were re-examining the origins of the Korean War; the outbreak of that conflict, they believed, was at least in part attributable to the policies of the United States.

The new historical views of the cold war were fascinating interpretations, and in seeking to understand how such a literature could arise the inquiring observer noticed, first of all, the relative