

■ NSC 68: “United States Objectives and Programs for National Security”

Date: April 7, 1950

Author: US Department of State Policy Planning Staff

Genre: government document

Summary Overview

US National Security Council Paper Number 68, or NSC 68 for short, was a top-secret report presented to President Harry S. Truman in April 1950. It came on the heels of the Soviet Union’s first successful detonation of an atomic bomb the previous year and amid the race to develop hydrogen bombs, whose destructive capacity far exceeded any previous nuclear technology. NSC 68 urged rearmament of conventional and nuclear weapons on a massive scale. The report identified Communism as a system of belief so fundamentally at odds with the United States that it could not be allowed to spread, a policy that became known as “containment.” It argued that steps needed to be taken to protect the United States and its allies from invasion and that the United States would have to lead the world in opposition to the Soviet Union. The document would prove to be one of the greatest influences on US policy throughout the Cold War.

Defining Moment

Two major events precipitated the development of NSC 68. The first was the victory of the Communist forces in China and the founding of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) in 1949. Another former ally of the United States was now firmly in league with the Soviet Union. The second was the knowledge that the Soviet Union had developed a nuclear weapon.

The world first understood the terrible, destructive power of nuclear energy (then known as “atomic” energy) when the United States dropped two nuclear bombs on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945. The United States and the Soviet Union were uneasy allies during World War II, but opposing ideologies and deep-seated mistrust ensured that the alliance would be strained. After the superiority of US weaponry was revealed, an international race to de-

velop nuclear arms began in earnest. With the United States and the Soviet Union positioned as the world’s two strongest powers after the war (they came to be called “superpowers”), tensions quickly escalated, and the Cold War developed.

On August 29, 1949, the first successful test was made by the Soviet Union of a nuclear weapon when “First Lightning” was detonated in the remote steppes of northeastern Kazakhstan. Soviet engineers had designed an entire city, including buildings, bridges, and a mock subway, and had filled the area with caged animals to study the effects of an atomic blast. The explosion was approximately twenty kilotons, similar to the original American tests. The mock city was entirely destroyed and the test animals incinerated. A specially equipped US spy plane detected the radiation, and the United States tracked the nuclear fallout and determined that an atomic test had taken place. President Truman announced to the world that the Soviet Union had the bomb, marking a key turning point in the new Cold War. In the wake of this development, Truman ordered that a top-secret study be made of the most effective way to combat the Soviet Union’s challenge to American dominance.

The United States had pursued a thermonuclear weapon since the beginning of World War II. This technology, known as the hydrogen bomb or H-bomb, used a small fission bomb to compress and ignite a powerful secondary blast at very high temperature using a nuclear fusion reaction. The destructive capacity of a thermonuclear weapon far outstripped the original atomic bomb. The US government was aware that the Soviet Union was in pursuit of this weapon as well, and at the time of the NSC 68 report, it was assumed that the Soviets would soon possess this technology, if they did not already. Attempts at international controls on nuclear technology had failed, and the United States

concluded that within a few years the Soviet Union would be capable of a full-scale nuclear attack on the United States. Three general schools of thought developed: leave the Soviet Union alone and allow economic forces to prevail; strike to destroy Communism and stop the development of ever-greater nuclear weapons; or attempt to contain Communism without directly attacking the Soviet Union.

Document Information

NSC 68 was instigated by President Truman, who was interested in revisiting national security strategy in the face of new developments in the Soviet Union's nuclear capability. Truman asked the State and Defense Departments to examine the current military and se-

curity situation and report back to him. A study group was formed by Secretary of State Dean Acheson and chaired by Paul Nitze, director of policy planning for the State Department. In addition to Nitze and Acheson, John P. Davis, Robert Tufts, and Robert Hooker were brought in from the Policy Planning Staff (PPS), along with Soviet expert and diplomat Chip Bohlen, Major General Truman Landon (representing the Joint Chiefs of Staff), Samuel S. Butano, and Deputy Secretary of Defense Robert Lovett. The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and other government agencies also had input.

The report, which underwent several revisions before being adopted, remained top secret until it was declassified in 1975.

HISTORICAL DOCUMENT

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

The foregoing analysis indicates that the probable fission bomb capability and possible thermonuclear bomb capability of the Soviet Union have greatly intensified the Soviet threat to the security of the United States. This threat is of the same character as that described in NSC 20/4 (approved by the President on November 24, 1948) but is more immediate than had previously been estimated. In particular, the United States now faces the contingency that within the next four or five years the Soviet Union will possess the military capability of delivering a surprise atomic attack of such weight that the United States must have substantially increased general air, ground, and sea strength, atomic capabilities, and air and civilian defenses to deter war and to provide reasonable assurance, in the event of war, that it could survive the initial blow and go on to the eventual attainment of its objectives. In return, this contingency requires the intensification of our efforts in the fields of intelligence and research and development.

Allowing for the immediacy of the danger, the following statement of Soviet threats, contained in NSC 20/4, remains valid:

14. The gravest threat to the security of the United States within the foreseeable future stems from the hostile designs and formidable power of the U.S.S.R., and from the nature of the Soviet system.

15. The political, economic, and psychological warfare which the U.S.S.R. is now waging has dangerous potentialities for weakening the relative world position of the United States and disrupting its traditional institutions by means short of war, unless sufficient resistance is encountered in the policies of this and other non-communist countries.

16. The risk of war with the U.S.S.R. is sufficient to warrant, in common prudence, timely and adequate preparation by the United States.

- a. Even though present estimates indicate that the Soviet leaders probably do not intend deliberate armed action involving the United States at this time, the possibility of such deliberate resort to war cannot be ruled out.
- b. Now and for the foreseeable future there is a continuing danger that war will arise either through Soviet miscalculation of the determination of the United States to use all the means at its command to safeguard its security, through Soviet misinterpretation of our intentions, or

through U.S. miscalculation of Soviet reactions to measures which we might take.

17. Soviet domination of the potential power of Eurasia, whether achieved by armed aggression or by political and subversive means, would be strategically and politically unacceptable to the United States.

18. The capability of the United States either in peace or in the event of war to cope with threats to its security or to gain its objectives would be severely weakened by internal development, important among which are:

- a. Serious espionage, subversion and sabotage, particularly by concerted and well-directed communist activity.
- b. Prolonged or exaggerated economic instability.
- c. Internal political and social disunity.
- d. Inadequate or excessive armament or foreign aid expenditures.
- e. An excessive or wasteful usage of our resources in time of peace.
- f. Lessening of U.S. prestige and influence through vacillation or appeasement or lack of skill and imagination in the conduct of its foreign policy or by shirking world responsibilities.
- g. Development of a false sense of security through a deceptive change in Soviet tactics.

Although such developments as those indicated in paragraph 18 above would severely weaken the capability of the United States and its allies to cope with the Soviet threat to their security, considerable progress has been made since 1948 in laying the foundation upon which adequate strength can now be rapidly built.

The analysis also confirms that our objectives with respect to the Soviet Union, in time of peace as well as in time of war, as stated in NSC 20/4 (para. 19), are still valid, as are the aims and measures stated therein (paras. 20 and 21). Our current security programs and strategic plans are based upon these objectives, aims, and measures:

19.
 - a. To reduce the power and influence of the U.S.S.R. to limits which no longer constitute a threat to the peace, national independence and stability of the world family of nations.

- b. To bring about a basic change in the conduct of international relations by the government in power in Russia, to conform with the purposes and principles set forth in the U.N. Charter.

In pursuing these objectives, due care must be taken to avoid permanently impairing our economy and the fundamental values and institutions inherent in our way of life.

20. We should endeavor to achieve our general objectives by methods short of war through the pursuit of the following aims:

- a. To encourage and promote the gradual retraction of undue Russian power and influence from the present perimeter areas around traditional Russian boundaries and the emergence of the satellite countries as entities independent of the U.S.S.R.
- b. To encourage the development among the Russian peoples of attitudes which may help to modify current Soviet behavior and permit a revival of the national life of groups evidencing the ability and determination to achieve and maintain national independence.
- c. To eradicate the myth by which people remote from Soviet military influence are held in a position of subservience to Moscow and to cause the world at large to see and understand the true nature of the U.S.S.R. and the Soviet-directed world communist party, and to adopt a logical and realistic attitude toward them.
- d. To create situations which will compel the Soviet Government to recognize the practical undesirability of acting on the basis of its present concepts and the necessity of behaving in accordance with precepts of international conduct, as set forth in the purposes and principles of the U.N. Charter.

21. Attainment of these aims requires that the United States:

- a. Develop a level of military readiness which can be maintained as long as necessary as a deterrent to Soviet aggression, as indispensable support to our political attitude toward

the U.S.S.R., as a source of encouragement to nations resisting Soviet political aggression, and as an adequate basis for immediate military commitments and for rapid mobilization should war prove unavoidable.

- b. Assure the internal security of the United States against dangers of sabotage, subversion, and espionage.
- c. Maximize our economic potential, including the strengthening of our peacetime economy and the establishment of essential reserves readily available in the event of war.
- d. Strengthen the orientation toward the United States of the non-Soviet nations; and help such of those nations as are able and willing to make an important contribution to U.S. security, to increase their economic and political stability and their military capability.
- e. Place the maximum strain on the Soviet structure of power and particularly on the relationships between Moscow and the satellite countries.
- f. Keep the U.S. public fully informed and cognizant of the threats to our national security so that it will be prepared to support the measures which we must accordingly adopt.

In the light of present and prospective Soviet atomic capabilities, the action which can be taken under present programs and plans, however, becomes dangerously inadequate, in both timing and scope, to accomplish the rapid progress toward the attainment of the United States political, economic, and military objectives which is now imperative.

A continuation of present trends would result in a serious decline in the strength of the free world relative to the Soviet Union and its satellites. This unfavorable trend arises from the inadequacy of current programs and plans rather than from any error in our objectives and aims. These trends lead in the direction of isolation, not by deliberate decision but by lack of the necessary basis for a vigorous initiative in the conflict with the Soviet Union.

Our position as the center of power in the free world places a heavy responsibility upon the United State for

leadership. We must organize and enlist the energies and resources of the free world in a positive program for peace which will frustrate the Kremlin design for world domination by creating a situation in the free world to which the Kremlin will be compelled to adjust. Without such a cooperative effort, led by the United States, we will have to make gradual withdrawals under pressure until we discover one day that we have sacrificed positions of vital interest.

It is imperative that this trend be reversed by a much more rapid and concerted build-up of the actual strength of both the United States and the other nations of the free world. The analysis shows that this will be costly and will involve significant domestic financial and economic adjustments.

The execution of such a build-up, however, requires that the United States have an affirmative program beyond the solely defensive one of countering the threat posed by the Soviet Union. This program must light the path to peace and order among nations in a system based on freedom and justice, as contemplated in the Charter of the United Nations. Further, it must envisage the political and economic measures with which and the military shield behind which the free world can work to frustrate the Kremlin design by the strategy of the cold war; for every consideration of devotion to our fundamental values and to our national security demands that we achieve our objectives by the strategy of the cold war, building up our military strength in order that it may not have to be used. The only sure victory lies in the frustration of the Kremlin design by the steady development of the moral and material strength of the free world and its projection into the Soviet world in such a way as to bring about an internal change in the Soviet system. Such a positive program—harmonious with our fundamental national purpose and our objectives—is necessary if we are to regain and retain the initiative and to win and hold the necessary popular support and cooperation in the United States and the rest of the free world.

This program should include a plan for negotiation with the Soviet Union, developed and agreed with our allies and which is consonant with our objectives. The United States and its allies, particularly the United Kingdom and France, should always be ready to negotiate with the Soviet Union on terms consistent with our

objectives. The present world situation, however, is one which militates against successful negotiations with the Kremlin—for the terms of agreements on important pending issues would reflect present realities and would therefore be unacceptable, if not disastrous, to the United States and the rest of the free world. After a decision and a start on building up the strength of the free world has been made, it might then be desirable for the United States to take an initiative in seeking negotiations in the hope that it might facilitate the process of accommodation by the Kremlin to the new situation. Failing that, the unwillingness of the Kremlin to accept equitable terms or its bad faith in observing them would assist in consolidating popular opinion in the free world in support of the measures necessary to sustain the build-up.

In summary, we must, by means of a rapid and sustained build-up of the political, economic, and military strength of the free world, and by means of an affirmative program intended to wrest the initiative from Soviet Union, confront it with convincing evidence of the determination and ability of the free world to frustrate the Kremlin design of a world dominated by its will. Such evidence is the only means short of war which eventually may force the Kremlin to abandon its present course of action and to negotiate acceptable agreements on issues of major importance.

The whole success of the proposed program hangs ultimately on recognition by this Government, the American people, and all free peoples, that the cold war is in

fact a real war in which the survival of the free world is at stake. Essential prerequisites to success are consultations with Congressional leaders designed to make the program the object of non-partisan legislative support, and a presentation to the public of a full explanation of the facts and implications of the present international situation. The prosecution of the program will require of us all the ingenuity, sacrifice, and unity demanded by the vital importance of the issue and the tenacity to persevere until our national objectives have been attained.

Recommendations

That the President:

- a. Approve the foregoing Conclusions.
- b. Direct the National Security Council, under the continuing direction of the President, and with the participation of other Departments and Agencies as appropriate, to coordinate and insure the implementation of the Conclusions herein on an urgent and continuing basis for as long as necessary to achieve our objectives. For this purpose, representatives of the member Departments and Agencies, the Joint Chiefs of Staff or their deputies, and other Departments and Agencies as required should be constituted as a revised and strengthened staff organization under the National Security Council to develop coordinated programs for consideration by the National Security Council.

Document Analysis

This selection from NSC 68 offers a summary of the detailed analysis presented in the rest of the document. It argues that the Soviet Union’s nuclear capability makes it the greatest threat to the security of the United States, as it will soon be able to launch a full-scale nuclear attack. All efforts must be made to prepare for such an attack and defend against it. This means expanding intelligence and technological capabilities and supporting “substantially increased general air, ground, and sea strength, atomic capabilities, and air and civilian defenses to deter war.”

The conclusions of the report are based on the belief that the Soviet Union’s “hostile designs” are the greatest security threat confronting the United States in the

world. Though the authors acknowledge that no attack is imminent at the time of the report, it is prudent to prepare for that possibility. The position of the United States in the world depends on its ability to resist the expansion of Communism and the influence of the Soviet Union in the rest of the world. Isolationism is not seen as a viable alternative, as the domination of Europe and Asia by the Soviet Union and China is “strategically and politically unacceptable.” It is not a time for the United States to be “shirking world responsibilities.” Threats from inside the United States are considered as well, including espionage and sabotage followed closely by economic instability and a false sense of security. Perhaps more ominously, “political and social disunity” are identified as internal threats, foreshadowing the threats to free speech that would accompany the hearings of

Senator Joseph McCarthy, who saw Communist operatives in every corner.

The report also details the steps that should be taken, short of war, to weaken the position of the Soviet Union in the world by encouraging resistance to Communist leadership in countries bordering Russia. The Soviet Union would be pressured to conform to “precepts of international conduct” as set forth by the United Nations. A multipronged approach is suggested to protect US national security interests. The United States must be in a state of military preparedness. It must also be able to identify and eliminate internal threats and maintain a thriving economy. It must encourage dissent from within the Soviet Union and within its satellite states. The United States must direct the “steady development of the moral and material strength of the free world.”

Essential Themes

The primary conclusion of NCS 68 was that the president needed to drastically increase the pace of weapons development and the quantity of defensive weapons ready to be used against an increasing Soviet threat. An attack could only be deterred if it was clear that the United States held the military advantage and could retaliate with catastrophic consequences if attacked. This conclusion informed Cold War policy for years to come, resulting in a nuclear arms race between the United States and the Soviet Union and proxy battles throughout the world.

The recommendations of NCS 68 were not accepted immediately, however. Truman balked at agreeing to a massive but unspecified increase in military spending. Some diplomats familiar with the Soviet Union believed that despite its possession of the atomic bomb, Soviet military capabilities had been greatly exaggerated. Sev-

eral members of the planning group were convinced that the focus of US policy and spending should be on economic and political initiatives designed to weaken the Soviet Union and lessen its control of other countries in Europe and Asia, rather than military buildup. Truman initially sent the report back for further review and more specific cost estimates.

In June 1950, South Korea was invaded by North Korean forces supported by Communist China and the Soviet Union. This erased any lingering doubt on the part of the Truman administration that the Soviet Union was afraid to use military force to press its aims. In addition, popular opinion in the United States became increasingly hostile to anyone believed to have Communist sympathies. Politicians accused each other and the administration of being “soft on Communism.” In response, Truman signed NCS 68 in September 1950, and the United States government began ramping up military spending, nearly tripling defense spending between 1950 and 1954.

—Bethany Groff Dorau, MA

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■ Report to the American People on Korea and US Policy in the Far East

Date: April 11, 1951

Author: Harry S. Truman

Genre: speech

Summary Overview

In April 1951, the Korean War had been underway for nearly ten months, and tensions between General Douglas MacArthur, commander in chief of the United Nations Command in South Korea, and President Harry S. Truman had been mounting since the beginning of the conflict. MacArthur had operated decisively and, some felt, recklessly since the invasion of South Korea by Communist North Korea on June 25, 1950, first authorizing arms shipments, then deciding to attack beyond the thirty-eighth parallel that had divided zones of occupation between the United States and Soviet Union at the end of World War II. Many considered this a dangerous provocation of China and the Soviet Union, and MacArthur underestimated the number of Chinese forces north of the Korean border. On April 5, a letter from MacArthur undercutting Truman administration foreign policy was read on the floor of the House of Representatives. It was the last straw for Truman, who decided that MacArthur had to be replaced. This radio report was meant to explain the president's unpopular decision.

Defining Moment

The Korean War began on June 25, 1950, when Communist forces from North Korea attacked South Korea. Korea had been part of the Japanese Empire before World War II, and it was divided into two distinct occupation zones by the Soviet Union and the United States after the war. The invasion of South Korea was widely seen as an attempt by the Soviet Union and Communist China to test the willingness of the United Nations to resist Communist territorial expansion. The UN acted decisively, two days later passing Resolution 83, authorizing assistance to South Korea to repel the attack. The South Korean capital, Seoul, fell the next day, on June 28.

General Douglas MacArthur, in command of the postwar Allied occupation of Japan, was a hero to many Americans and had commanded the Pacific theater during World War II, famously, if unsuccessfully, defending the Philippines in the Battle of Bataan. After the war, he was made the supreme commander of the Allied powers and was still the highest ranking commander in Asia in 1950.

When North Korea invaded, MacArthur took control of the defense of South Korea, and from the beginning, he took steps that Truman believed overreached his authority. MacArthur committed first supplies and then air and naval operations prior to receiving authorization from the president. On June 30, Truman authorized the use of ground forces, and MacArthur was named the official head of United Nations Command in South Korea. Truman and his advisors were wary of pushing the Soviet Union and China into open conflict, and MacArthur openly challenged him on this, arguing that strong and aggressive defense was the only way to meet the Communist threat in Asia.

On September 15, 1950, MacArthur led a daring and highly successful amphibious assault on Inchon, and by September 27, the North Korean army had been driven out of Seoul and the surrounding area. Truman was hesitant to encourage the pursuit of the retreating North Koreans past the thirty-eighth parallel, the original dividing line, as he feared it would invite conflict with the Chinese. MacArthur assured Truman that the Chinese were not going to involve themselves in the war in a meaningful way and convinced Truman to authorize military intervention above the thirty-eighth parallel. However, the Chinese did invade, with two hundred thousand troops on October 25, and the UN forces, having penetrated far into North Korea, suffered a series of military reversals from November to January;

the Chinese drove them south across the thirty-eighth parallel, ultimately capturing Seoul.

MacArthur chafed at restrictions on military activities over the border in China itself, arguing that the Chinese military could be stopped at the source. In March 1951, MacArthur issued a statement giving his views on a proposed ceasefire, in contravention of Truman's orders (and the American tradition) that military officials avoid making public statements on foreign policy. On April 5, House Minority Leader Joseph William Martin Jr. read a letter from MacArthur asserting that Asia should be the main focus of international efforts to defeat Communism—an implicit critique of the Truman administration's focus on Europe and another foray by a military official into foreign policy matters. Truman relieved him of command on April 11, 1951.

Author Biography

Harry S. Truman was born in Lamar, Missouri, in 1884, the oldest of three children. A farmer and livestock dealer, his father was well connected with the local Democratic Party, and Truman served as a page boy at the 1900 Democratic National Convention. After graduating from high school, Truman worked several clerical

jobs and as a railroad timekeeper. He served in the Missouri National Guard during World War I despite poor eyesight, and he was elected an officer by his men (a custom at that time). After the war, Truman returned to Independence, Missouri, and opened a men's clothing shop. The shop failed, but Truman was elected a county court judge in 1922 and served in a variety of public offices until he was elected to the United States Senate in 1934. While in the Senate, Truman became known for investigating claims of graft and corruption in military industries. He was elected Franklin D. Roosevelt's vice president in 1944 and became president of the United States on April 12, 1945, upon Roosevelt's death. Truman made the decision to drop the atomic bomb on two cities in Japan in August 1945, near the end of World War II. Truman oversaw the end of the war, the establishment of the United Nations, and the implementation of the Marshall Plan to rebuild Europe. He supported a policy of containment to control the spread of Communism. Truman won a narrow victory in 1948 for a full term as president, but he did not seek reelection in 1952. He died in 1972 and is buried in Independence, Missouri.

HISTORICAL DOCUMENT

My fellow Americans:

I want to talk to you plainly tonight about what we are doing in Korea and about our policy in the Far East.

In the simplest terms, what we are doing in Korea is this: We are trying to prevent a third world war.

I think most people in this country recognized that fact last June. And they warmly supported the decision of the Government to help the Republic of Korea against the Communist aggressors. Now, many persons, even some who applauded our decision to defend Korea, have forgotten the basic reason for our action.

It is right for us to be in Korea now. It was right last June. It is right today.

I want to remind you why this is true.

The Communists in the Kremlin are engaged in a monstrous conspiracy to stamp out freedom all over the world. If they were to succeed, the United States would be numbered among their principal victims. It must be

clear to everyone that the United States cannot—and will not—sit idly by and await foreign conquest. The only question is: What is the best time to meet the threat and how is the best way to meet it?

The best time to meet the threat is in the beginning. It is easier to put out a fire in the beginning when it is small than after it has become a roaring blaze. And the best way to meet the threat of aggression is for the peace-loving nations to act together. If they don't act together, they are likely to be picked off, one by one.

If they had followed the right policies in the 1930's—if the free countries had acted together to crush the aggression of the dictators, and if they had acted in the beginning when the aggression was small—there probably would have been no World War II.

If history has taught us anything, it is that aggression anywhere in the world is a threat to the peace everywhere in the world. When that aggression is supported by the

cruel and selfish rulers of a powerful nation who are bent on conquest, it becomes a clear and present danger to the security and independence of every free nation.

This is a lesson that most people in this country have learned thoroughly. This is the basic reason why we joined in creating the United Nations. And, since the end of World War II, we have been putting that lesson into practice—we have been working with other free nations to check the aggressive designs of the Soviet Union before they can result in a third world war.

That is what we did in Greece, when that nation was threatened by the aggression of international communism.

The attack against Greece could have led to general war. But this country came to the aid of Greece. The United Nations supported Greek resistance. With our help, the determination and efforts of the Greek people defeated the attack on the spot.

Another big Communist threat to peace was the Berlin blockade. That too could have led to war. But again it was settled because free men would not back down in an emergency.

The aggression against Korea is the boldest and most dangerous move the Communists have yet made.

The attack on Korea was part of a greater plan for conquering all of Asia.

I would like to read to you from a secret intelligence report which came to us after the attack on Korea. It is a report of a speech a Communist army officer in North Korea gave to a group of spies and saboteurs last May, 1 month before South Korea was invaded. The report shows in great detail how this invasion was part of a carefully prepared plot. Here, in part, is what the Communist officer, who had been trained in Moscow, told his men: "Our forces," he said, "are scheduled to attack South Korean forces about the middle of June.... The coming attack on South Korea marks the first step toward the liberation of Asia."

Notice that he used the word "liberation." This is Communist double-talk meaning "conquest."

I have another secret intelligence report here. This one tells what another Communist officer in the Far East told his men several months before the invasion of Korea. Here is what he said: "In order to successfully undertake the long-awaited world revolution, we must first unify

Asia.... Java, Indochina, Malaya, India, Tibet, Thailand, Philippines, and Japan are our ultimate targets.... The United States is the only obstacle on our road for the liberation of all the countries in southeast Asia. In other words, we must unify the people of Asia and crush the United States." Again, "liberation" in "commie" language means conquest.

That is what the Communist leaders are telling their people, and that is what they have been trying to do.

They want to control all Asia from the Kremlin.

This plan of conquest is in flat contradiction to what we believe. We believe that Korea belong to the Koreans, we believe that India belongs to the Indians, we believe that all the nations of Asia should be free to work out their affairs in their own way. This is the basis of peace in the Far East, and it is the basis of peace everywhere else.

The whole Communist imperialism is back of the attack on peace in the Far East. It was the Soviet Union that trained and equipped the North Koreans for aggression. The Chinese Communists massed 44 well-trained and well-equipped divisions on the Korean frontier. These were the troops they threw into battle when the North Korean Communists were beaten.

The question we have had to face is whether the Communist plan of conquest can be stopped without a general war. Our Government and other countries associated with us in the United Nations believe that the best chance of stopping it without a general war is to meet the attack in Korea and defeat it there.

That is what we have been doing. It is a difficult and bitter task.

But so far it has been successful.

So far, we have prevented world war III.

So far, by fighting a limited war in Korea, we have prevented aggression from succeeding, and bringing on a general war. And the ability of the whole free world to resist Communist aggression has been greatly improved.

We have taught the enemy a lesson. He has found that aggression is not cheap or easy. Moreover, men all over the world who want to remain free have been given new courage and new hope. They know now that the champions of freedom can stand up and fight, and that they will stand up and fight.

Our resolute stand in Korea is helping the forces of freedom now fighting in Indochina and other countries

in that part of the world. It has already slowed down the timetable of conquest.

In Korea itself there are signs that the enemy is building up his ground forces for a new mass offensive. We also know that there have been large increases in the enemy's available air forces.

If a new attack comes, I feel confident it will be turned back. The United Nations fighting forces are tough and able and well equipped. They are fighting for a just cause. They are proving to all the world that the principle of collective security will work. We are proud of all these forces for the magnificent job they have done against heavy odds. We pray that their efforts may succeed, for upon their success may hinge the peace of the world.

The Communist side must now choose its course of action. The Communist rulers may press the attack against us. They may take further action which will spread the conflict. They have that choice, and with it the awful responsibility for what may follow. The Communists also have the choice of a peaceful settlement which could lead to a general relaxation of the tensions in the Far East. The decision is theirs, because the forces of the United Nations will strive to limit the conflict if possible.

We do not want to see the conflict in Korea extended. We are trying to prevent a world war—not to start one. And the best way to do that is to make it plain that we and the other free countries will continue to resist the attack.

But you may ask why can't we take other steps to punish the aggressor. Why don't we bomb Manchuria and China itself? Why don't we assist the Chinese Nationalist troops to land on the mainland of China?

If we were to do these things we would be running a very grave risk of starting a general war. If that were to happen, we would have brought about the exact situation we are trying to prevent.

If we were to do these things, we would become entangled in a vast conflict on the continent of Asia and our task would become immeasurably more difficult all over the world.

What would suit the ambitions of the Kremlin better than for our military forces to be committed to a full-scale war with Red China?

It may well be that, in spite of our best efforts, the Communists may spread the war. But it would be wrong—tragically wrong—for us to take the initiative in extending the war.

The dangers are great. Make no mistake about it. Behind the North Koreans and Chinese Communists in the front lines stand additional millions of Chinese soldiers. And behind the Chinese stand the tanks, the planes, the submarines, the soldiers, and the scheming rulers of the Soviet Union.

Our aim is to avoid the spread of the conflict.

The course we have been following is the one best calculated to avoid an all-out war. It is the course consistent with our obligation to do all we can to maintain international peace and security. Our experience in Greece and Berlin shows that it is the most effective course of action we can follow.

First of all, it is clear that our efforts in Korea can blunt the will of the Chinese Communists to continue the struggle. The United Nations forces have put up a tremendous fight in Korea and have inflicted very heavy casualties on the enemy. Our forces are stronger now than they have been before. These are plain facts which may discourage the Chinese Communists from continuing their attack.

Second, the free world as a whole is growing in military strength every day. In the United States, in Western Europe, and throughout the world, free men are alert to the Soviet threat and are building their defenses. This may discourage the Communist rulers from continuing the war in Korea—and from undertaking new acts of aggression elsewhere.

If the Communist authorities realize that they cannot defeat us in Korea, if they realize it would be foolhardy to widen the hostilities beyond Korea, then they may recognize the folly of continuing their aggression. A peaceful settlement may then be possible. The door is always open.

Then we may achieve a settlement in Korea which will not compromise the principles and purposes of the United Nations.

I have thought long and hard about this question of extending the war in Asia. I have discussed it many times with the ablest military advisers in the country. I believe

with all my heart that the course we are following is the best course.

I believe that we must try to limit the war to Korea for these vital reasons: to make sure that the precious lives of our fighting men are not wasted; to see that the security of our country and the free world is not needlessly jeopardized; and to prevent a third world war.

A number of events have made it evident that General MacArthur did not agree with that policy. I have therefore considered it essential to relieve General MacArthur so that there would be no doubt or confusion as to the real purpose and aim of our policy.

It was with the deepest personal regret that I found myself compelled to take this action. General MacArthur is one of our greatest military commanders. But the cause of world peace is much more important than any individual.

The change in commands in the Far East means no change whatever in the policy of the United States. We will carry on the fight in Korea with vigor and determination in an effort to bring the war to a speedy and successful conclusion. The new commander, Lt. Gen. Matthew Ridgway, has already demonstrated that he has the great qualities of military leadership needed for this task.

We are ready, at any time, to negotiate for a restoration of peace in the area. But we will not engage in appeasement. We are only interested in real peace.

Real peace can be achieved through a settlement based on the following factors:

One: The fighting must stop.

Two: Concrete steps must be taken to insure that the fighting will not break out again.

Three: There must be an end to the aggression.

A settlement founded upon these elements would open the way for the unification of Korea and the withdrawal of all foreign forces.

In the meantime, I want to be clear about our military objective. We are fighting to resist an outrageous aggression in Korea. We are trying to keep the Korean conflict from spreading to other areas. But at the same time we must conduct our military activities so as to insure the security of our forces. This is essential if they are to continue the fight until the enemy abandons its ruthless attempt to destroy the Republic of Korea.

That is our military objective—to repel attack and to restore peace.

In the hard fighting in Korea, we are proving that collective action among nations is not only a high principle but a workable means of resisting aggression. Defeat of aggression in Korea may be the turning point in the world's search for a practical way of achieving peace and security.

The struggle of the United Nations in Korea is a struggle for peace.

Free nations have united their strength in an effort to prevent a third world war.

That war can come if the Communist rulers want it to come. But this Nation and its allies will not be responsible for its coming.

We do not want to widen the conflict. We will use every effort to prevent that disaster. And in so doing, we know that we are following the great principles of peace, freedom, and justice.

Document Analysis

Truman begins his radio address by reminding the American people in the plainest terms possible why the United States is at war in Korea: “We are trying to prevent a third world war.” The United States was right to be involved and to remain engaged in the fight against the “monstrous conspiracy” of Communism. Truman lays responsibility for the conflict squarely at the door of the Soviet Union, which was seen as the driving force behind Communist movements anywhere in the world throughout the Cold War. Truman argues that if Communism were allowed to spread from country to country through invasion, the United States

would eventually be the next target; thus, he argues, the country cannot allow the aggression against South Korea to go unchecked. “It is easier to put out a fire in the beginning when it is small than after it has become a roaring blaze,” he says, adding that if leaders such as Adolf Hitler had been stopped in the 1930s, World War II may have been prevented.

Truman lists other conflicts where the intervention of the United States, under the auspices of the United Nations, had successfully checked Communist expansion, including in Greece and West Berlin. Communist involvement in Korea was part of a plan to gain total control of Asia, he argues. The Soviet Union had trained

North Korean forces, and the Chinese had entered the war in huge numbers, both with the long-term aim of installing Communist regimes in all Asian countries.

Truman acknowledges that it may seem tempting to check further Communist aggression by taking the fight to the Chinese on their own soil, as through an air campaign or assisting Chinese anti-Communist forces. However, he again asserts that the ultimate goal is to avoid a general war by defeating discrete acts of Communist aggression in places like Korea.

Truman then addresses his decision, issued earlier that day, to relieve MacArthur of his command duties. With regard to the goal of limiting the conflict in Korea, he says, "A number of events have made it evident that General MacArthur did not agree with that policy." Truman therefore found it necessary, "with deepest personal regret," to relieve MacArthur so that the US policy against escalating the conflict beyond Korea was clear.

Essential Themes

Truman's goal in his radio address of April 1951 was to foreground his bedrock commitment to checking Communist aggression around the world, while being clear about the limits of his administration's policy on

the Korean Peninsula. Truman expressed that he had lost faith in MacArthur's willingness to keep the war in Korea from escalating into a wider conflict with China, and so Truman removed him. In the short term, this was a very unpopular decision, as MacArthur enjoyed probably greater popularity in the United States than Truman, and the president's popularity sank even further following this announcement. A few months later, a congressional inquiry was launched into Truman's decision, and it was found that he was within his constitutional powers as president to remove MacArthur, though the decision was a "shock to national pride." The incident remains a topic of study and debate in the area of civil-military relations in the United States.

—Bethany Groff Dorau, MA

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