Dean Acheson and American Foreign Policy, 1947-1950

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Dean Acheson was the fifty-first United States Secretary of State appointed to this Cabinet position by President Harry S. Truman. The confirmation of his position occurred in January 1949 and he served through January of 1953. Acheson was instrumental in developing and implementing United States’ foreign policy which had positive, profound, and long-lasting effect. The point to be examined here is the evolution of his policy from benign coexistence to aggressive containment. This thesis will be examined during that period of his career from 1947 (as Under Secretary) through 1950, specifically, his role in the development and application of the Truman Doctrine, the Marshall Plan, its military corollary the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and NSC-68. The Mutual Defense Assistance Program will also be included because although not Achesonian in origin, he did see it to its conclusion.

However, as is the case with any story, some background information is necessary, if not as a determinant of/for favorable opinion, then at least to present a more complete picture of the events about to unfold. It is essential to know the character development, in order to understand the direction(s) Dean Acheson took as a Statesman. As Acheson himself so succinctly phrased it, “many of the moralistic maxims adapted to the conduct of foreign affairs are apt to reflect personal prejudice or sententious sentiment.”

In 1893, the eldest child of Eleanor Gertrude Gooderham and Edward Campion Acheson was born: Dean Gooderham Acheson. His upper middle class family lived in Middletown, Connecticut, where his father a Bishop in the Episcopal Church. The family’s influence and income was considerably supplemented by Mrs. Acheson’s prosperous father, and so the Achesons lived quite well. They could afford to have Dean privately educated – Groton, Yale, Harvard Law. Never an exceptionally good student, Dean Acheson did manage to overcome the fecklessness of youth, and at law school did quite well. At Harvard he was a student of, and eventually became good friends with, Felix Frankfurter. Through Frankfurter’s connection with/to Justice Brandeis, Acheson was able to secure a clerkship (with Brandeis) at the United States Supreme Court. He would clerk for Brandeis for two years, and become an ardent admirer of Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes. He joined the Washington law firm of Rublee/Covington and did the
business of lawyering. His was a successful career, but not an altogether remarkable period in Acheson’s life.\footnote{7}

In 1933, President Franklin D. Roosevelt approved his nomination for and subsequent appointment to and confirmation as United States Under Secretary of the Treasury (with William Woodin serving as Secretary).\footnote{8} There were two things which militated against the probable success of this appointment: Dean Acheson knew nothing about the function of a bureaucrat and he knew even less about the world of finance/economics.\footnote{9} There was a third ingredient in this cocktail for disaster. Shortly after Acheson was confirmed as Under Secretary, Woodin became gravely ill, and Acheson took his place as Acting Secretary of the Treasury.\footnote{10} At this time, the Great Depression was well underway, and in an attempt to bring the economy of the United States under control, and restore some stability to the commercial markets, Roosevelt believed that an artificial manipulation of the price of gold may be the best course of action to revive the economy. He thus ordered his Acting Secretary to actively engage in the execution of this plan.\footnote{11} At first, Acheson demurred, believing the action, if not illegal, then at least beyond his purview. He would act at the President’s direction only reluctantly, and then only after denying any responsibility for such policy.\footnote{12} Such behavior was not acceptable from a member of the President’s cabinet, and Acheson was asked to resign.\footnote{13} The enmity which Acheson bore toward Franklin D. Roosevelt would last to the end of his life.\footnote{14} Acheson would accept little blame for this humiliation which he had brought upon himself. However, there were valuable lessons here, and Acheson learned them well.\footnote{15}

Dean Acheson was a bureaucrat and bureaucrats are functionaries. He would become the quintessential bureaucratic in-fighter and jealously guard his department from those who would wish to intrude. Effective high level bureaucrats must be the best functioning executives. They must not only manage the business at hand and the department, but they must also know the difference between what they desire personally by way of action and what the needs are of those for whom they work. If one is to be held responsible for policy, one would want to be part of the decision making process, and if one is to be part of the decision making process, that person must be proactive, and proactive means contribution and compromise. For Acheson, contribution meant preparedness (knowledge) and compromise extended primarily to particulars, not principle – to his professional life, but not to his private life.

Fortunately for Acheson, the professional and personal indignities he suffered as a result of his uncanny ability to be “hoist[ed] on one’s own petard,” were not fatal. The days spent in the wilderness would stretch for eight years, ending in 1941. His nemesis, Franklin D. Roosevelt, approved his appointment as Assistant Secretary of State (with Cordell Hull being Secretary).\footnote{16} Although this reappointment was politically motivated, Dean Acheson was not a “politician.” His close association with the Democratic Party, and, again, his friendship with Frankfurter were instrumental in this resurrection, but it appears that it was Roosevelt himself who took the initiative to bring Acheson back into public service.\footnote{17} His impression of the State Department under Hull was one “…without direction…adrift, carried hither and yon by the currents of war or pushed about by collisions with more purposeful craft.”\footnote{18} He was not disappointed, but neither was he impressed.
Assigned to Economic Affairs, Acheson was relegated to approving material shipments to and from the United States and various other countries – not in the realm of policy making. Edward Stettinius, Hull’s successor as Secretary, reshuffled the department and reassigned Acheson to Congressional Liaison (while he still served as an Assistant Secretary). In Economic Affairs and as Congressional Liaison, Acheson was able to see firsthand how the legislative processes of the United States worked, i.e., “its actual role in our scheme of government as against the constitutional theory of it.” In addition, he was able to see which representatives were responsible for making the legislative process work. Stettinius’s tour of duty as Secretary was quite brief. “Snow White,” as Stettinius was affectionately referred to by Acheson, was succeeded by James Byrnes in July 1945. For Acheson, who had never been very impressed by Stettinius’s performance within the State Department, the Secretary’s departure was of no significant loss.

Acheson tendered his resignation, it was accepted, and in August of 1945 he was again about to engage in the profession of lawyering. Within a week, as fate would have it and as he himself would later remark, “I was to learn how vast a part luck plays in our lives,” Acheson was United States Under Secretary of State (pending confirmation) – his resignation having been accepted and then rescinded within days of submission. Acheson did have misgivings about this decision to return to the State Department. He was “acutely conscious that [he] was entering Indian country.” As the case would be, Acheson held this job as Under Secretary of State for six-hundred seventy-two days. Secretary Byrnes would spend most of his time out of the country (of his 562 days as Secretary, Byrnes was away for 350 of them) and thus, the business of running the Department of State fell to Acheson. As a result of Byrnes’s absence, Acheson became Acting Secretary and was thus required to attend the President’s cabinet meetings. Dean Acheson had now moved to the center of policy debate, his counsel being sought and his input seriously considered. However, Acheson’s effectiveness was seriously undermined by Byrnes who would occasionally by-pass or contradict his Under Secretary in personnel and policy matters. As Acheson recalled, “the lines of command [during his time under Byrnes] were not clear.”

The work to which he would expend all of his effort was daunting, “the enormity of the task...after the wars in Europe and Asia ended in 1945, only slowly revealed itself...to create a world out of chaos.” However, Acheson did not hesitate to engage the challenge before him. Two critical points soon became evident if he was to make a positive and lasting contribution. The first involved the role of the State Department. Roosevelt was his own Secretary of State and hence the function and status of the Department fell into a state of desuetude, its counsel not sought nor heeded. Acheson worked to restore the Department to its historically preeminent position within the cabinet, by being knowledgeable about all matters that would rightfully fall under the purview of State, and then ensuring against incursions by other departments on its territory. It also helped that President Truman was predisposed to considering the Department of State in a favorable light.

The second critical point was to serve as faithfully and accurately the needs of his President. Concerning this latter condition, Secretary Byrnes appeared to be woefully inadequate, especially when it came to keeping the President advised of negotiations and discussions with foreign governments. For Byrnes, this shortcoming would have fatal
consequences (as Secretary of State). Yet for Acheson this would again be no great loss. He thought little more of Byrnes’s performance as Secretary of State than that of either of his two predecessors.

In February 1946, Joseph Stalin outlined in “brutal clarity” that Soviet foreign policy would not include peaceful coexistence. Shortly thereafter, George Kennan (United States Charge d’affaires, Moscow) followed this with his “Long Telegram,” warning that the United States should be prepared for an extended political struggle with the Soviets, who could only be satisfied with the dominance and destruction of all things not communist. Americans’ sympathies toward their Russian war allies began to change, and Truman, the politician, was quick to take note of this. However, he did not demand that his executive advisors blindly follow (most of them owed their allegiance and positions to Roosevelt and displayed only minimal loyalty to Truman). Acheson was a case in point. According to several historians, such as Robert Beisner and James Chace, Acheson at this point in time was not overly concerned and still felt that some common ground could be found on which to base diplomatic relations with Russia. For example, Acheson’s continued work on international atomic energy control is cited as evidence of his belief that cooperative ties with the Soviets could be still be established. In all fairness, it should be noted that Acheson did not volunteer for this particular assignment.

The midterm elections of 1946 clearly demonstrated dissatisfaction with the policies of the Democratic Party and foreign policy was not an exception. The Secretary of Agriculture, Henry Wallace, who had advocated a more conciliatory approach toward the Soviet Union, had set off an internecine cabinet fight with Secretary Byrnes, a fight which had caused a rift within the Democratic Party. In the case of Truman, it did not take too much convincing that Russia was not to be trusted. Early on, Truman had seen the weakness of his predecessor’s treatments with Russia and quickly abandoned that tack. Acheson’s conversion took a little longer, but it was no less sincere. The part the United States was to play internationally was becoming, if anything, much clearer. It was also becoming equally evident that resolution of the Soviet problem would involve addressing issues not only in Europe, but also in Asia. The United States had to assume leadership in this struggle against communism and could not revert to its historical sanctuary of isolationism.

President Truman gave General George C. Marshall the assignment to assess the situation in China and advise as to the best course of action to be pursued vis-à-vis the communist/nationalist struggle. Acheson was appointed Marshall’s Washington liaison through whom all information would be relayed to the President and vice versa. This was a particularly awkward position for Acheson because he now had to serve two masters, President Truman and Secretary Byrnes.

At this time, the question of policy in regards to the use of atomic weapons/nuclear power needed to be addressed and so, Acheson (Lilienthal) was appointed to the advisory commission. In January of 1946, Secretary Byrnes appointed Dean Acheson to chair a committee which was to develop policy proposals for the control of atomic energy. Acheson gathered a distinguished board of members and by the following March, a working draft was being circulated: the Acheson-Lilienthal Plan. The proposal recommended, after a period of transition, that control would pass from the United States to an international body. At the time of the draft’s release,
Secretary Byrnes recommended to President Truman the appointment of Bernard Baruch as United States delegate to the United Nations Atomic Energy Commission. Baruch assembled his own committee to consider atomic energy control and by the end of April, had a proposal. The ensuing dust-up with Acheson was predictable, when Baruch was able to get the President to endorse his proposal over the Acheson-Lilienthal Plan. The denouement in this little drama was that neither plan was ever adopted, and Bernard Baruch had one less friend in the world.

In addition to the issue of using atomic weapons/nuclear power, appropriate response to matters, such as those regarding Palestine, South America, Soviet intentions in Western Germany/Japan and its interests in the eastern Mediterranean, and especially the problems confronting the Western European nations became the responsibility of the office of the Under Secretary at this time. Unhappy with Byrnes's style, President Truman chose George C. Marshall to be the next United States Secretary of State (January 1947). Acheson's reacted to this change of command thusly: "This whole episode is a thoroughly unhappy memory." Once again, Acheson tendered his resignation, it becoming effective in July 1947. However, much was to happen before this departure.

This "change of command" might not have been to Acheson's liking, but President Truman's choice of General George Catlett Marshall to succeed James Byrnes as Secretary of State could not have been better. There are very few people to whom Dean Acheson gave ungrudging respect, and besides the two mentioned in this paragraph (Truman and Marshall) could only be added Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes — an observation only as it concerns Acheson's professional, not personal life. Rarely did Acheson pay a compliment to anyone without a back-handed reservation. In this regard, Acheson particularly liked Douglas Southall Freeman's assessment of his (i.e., Acheson's) own attitude: "Acheson found it difficult to conceal his contempt for the contemptible."

On March 12, 1947, President Harry S. Truman delivered an address to a joint session of Congress requesting aid for both Greece and Turkey — this speech for ever after was known as the Truman Doctrine. Joseph M. Jones (State Department, Public Affairs) was the primary writer, but the real force behind this speech was Dean Acheson who had insisted that this speech be "precisely formulated" in order to give its full, intended effect. The necessity for this action was not unanticipated. Both Secretary Byrnes and his successor, Marshall, had been aware of the deteriorating conditions engulfing the two nations in particular and Europe in general. In addition, both men had instructed Acheson to prepare for this eventuality. As Acheson would later reflect, during this particular period of activity,

The financial effort was immense. So were the production and military efforts. But...the real achievement...lies, I think, in the boldness, the imaginativeness, the creativeness of the thinking, and perhaps most of all in the will which those in charge maintained and communicated to the country. This stemmed straight from President Truman himself. The sustained leadership and effort...represented a revolution in American foreign policy and the assumption of burdens and responsibilities wholly new to us.
By late 1946, time and events had overwhelmed the governments of Greece and Turkey. They could no longer deal effectively with the problems with which they were faced.\textsuperscript{51} Political and economic turmoil had wracked both countries since the cessation of armed conflict in 1945. The economy of Greece needed constant infusions from outside sources, and the communists had engaged in an armed rebellion to take power.\textsuperscript{52} The British had managed to keep the Greek government from going into bankruptcy, and it was only the British presence which had temporarily checked the communist insurgency. Turkey had similar economic difficulties, but its real threat had come from without. Stalin had been pressuring Turkey to establish joint control of the Dardanelles.\textsuperscript{53} In 1946, there was every indication that it might come at the cost of a military invasion of Turkish territory by Russia.\textsuperscript{54}

The situation was becoming more precarious with each passing day in the new year. On Friday, February 21, 1947, Acheson took delivery of a “blue piece of paper” from Britain’s United States representative, Lord Inverchapel.\textsuperscript{55} In diplomatic parlance, this was a formal communication between governments – the advising of one country by another of actions intended or already taken which might affect the policy, and/or interests of the receiving government. In this particular instance, Great Britain indicated that it would no longer be able to maintain its support of Greece and Turkey either economically or militarily, and it was soon to withdraw from the area. The cost of this unmandated protection was beyond either the ability or the will of England to bear. England’s own economy was in need of attention, and public support for continued action in Greece had been exhausted.\textsuperscript{56} For Acheson, this development, though not specifically foreseen, necessarily had to be factored into any American program of relief. As Acheson saw the situation, America alone had the material, political, and economic means to provide relief.\textsuperscript{57}

Having already been instructed to prepare plans for direct aid, it was a matter for Acheson only to gather, collate, and assemble the material in some cogent and understandable format. This he did throughout that weekend (February 22\textsuperscript{nd} – 23rd). He advised his bosses, Truman and Marshall, of developments and asked their input.\textsuperscript{58} Neither could offer anything by way of addition or improvement to Acheson’s work. From the standpoint of State Department involvement, it was through Acheson’s efforts that the plan was ready for presentation that Monday (February 24\textsuperscript{th}) following receipt of England’s advisory note.\textsuperscript{59} Truman’s reaction was immediate: the proposal would go forward because the security of the nation demanded it, and “the consequences of inaction were clear enough.”\textsuperscript{60} Acheson, having made his case to Truman and Marshall, presented the facts to legislative leaders, at the White House. Approaching the meeting “with our congressional masters,” Acheson described the urgency of the matter thusly, “I knew we were met at Armageddon...never have I spoken under such a pressing sense that the issue was up to me alone.”\textsuperscript{61} The Congressional leaders proved, for the most part, to be receptive to the presentation made to them by and at the request of the Under Secretary (through the President, of course). The press was also given the same presentation by Acheson, by the end of that same week.\textsuperscript{62}

Senator Arthur Vandenberg (R-MI) was an early supporter of the proposal and he would shepherd the subsequent bill authorizing relief through his Senate Foreign Relations Committee – and voting for adoption upon release for full Senate approval.\textsuperscript{63}
As Acheson described it, Vandenberg’s “part in the enactment of this proposal into law was invaluable.” Opposition was minimal and had little impact on the final bill – a nigglng criticism raised by Walter Lippmann resulted in lip service being paid to the United Nations, an organization for which Acheson had little regard (although he was never injudicious to the point of publicly denouncing it while in State service). Acheson appeared numerous times before Senate and House committees treating of the proposal. Acheson offered testimony in support of the bill, at one point addressing one-eleven questions brought up by inquiring legislators. The Greek-Turkey Aid Act was approved by both houses of Congress and signed into law by President Truman on May 22, 1947.

Greece and Turkey would receive approximately $400,000,000.00 ($250,000,000 to Greece and $150,000,000 to Turkey) in aid under this bill. Over the ensuing years, Greece would receive over one billion dollars in U.S. assistance (it appears that Britain had accurately assessed the financial situation). For the United States, and Dean Acheson in particular, this event had repercussions that went far beyond economic and military relief. For Acheson, it was as an epiphany, an awakening to a reality of which he was aware, but not cognizant. That reality involved a Communist Russia which he now perceived as evil. Content heretofore with a kind of live and let live attitude, Acheson now moved to a more hardened resolve in his dealings with the Russia which he now considered “an eager and ruthless opponent.” He had been mistakenly accused of “appeasement” in his prior considerations of U.S.–Soviet Union relations. In reality, Acheson’s early position was a kind of benign accommodation (not “appeasement” and certainly not sympathy). Heretofore a Washington warrior, Acheson would take on an additional role as a Cold warrior.

Russia would not be discouraged or dissuaded by words or by example: “the Soviets negotiate by acts and not debate, offer and counteroffer. Their purpose may be to separate allies or undermine governments…win over uncommitted peoples. Or…to bring a sense of relaxation, good-will, security, before…some energetic offensive.” As such, Acheson recognized that only action would be of use against Soviet designs. Russia’s constant probing for weakness of resolve and unity among the United States and its allies had to be aggressively countered if the specter of totalitarianism was to be overcome. Acheson sought policies which would lead to positions of strength, and if at the same time such policies could undermine the Soviet programs, then so much the better. He cast aside anything that threatened to harm his security interests. Furthermore, Acheson believed that if any action was of benefit to his opponent, it had to be doubly avoided. Yet the actions of Russia were not the only source that motivated Acheson to change. Domestic pressures were also probably equally responsible for this redirection in Acheson’s thinking.

In this atmosphere, the politics of containment began to take shape. The crises in Greece and Turkey evidenced an urgent need to stem the tide and influence of the ever expansionist-minded Stalin. The old European order was not able to counter, by any means, the push of Russia by itself, but it was necessary to preserve the illusion that some resistance would be made, and Acheson committed himself to the task of building this allied resistance until it became a real force: “no balance of power in Europe or elsewhere, adequate to restrain Soviet power is possible unless the weight of the United States is put into the scales, without association with the United States, the European
powers cannot prevent the leaders of the Soviet Union from having their way in Western Europe” – an observation made by Acheson at a much later date, but consistently applicable. He knew that although the United States was the strongest of all the liberal democracies, its resources were not limitless. It could not be everything, to everyone, everywhere, all of the time. He would build upon those countries which appeared to have the best prospects for success. This plan for rebuilding would of necessity require the resuscitation of the political and economic machines of both Germany and Japan and eventually, their respective military capabilities if the Soviets were to be check-mated. By intervening in Greece and Turkey, the United States (read also, Acheson) demonstrated its (his) willingness to be the leader of the free world and America’s allies paid close attention.

In ideology, technology and historical tradition, the United States was closest to Western Europe and so it was little wonder that Acheson focused his rebuilding efforts on America’s former allies. Western European political ideology tended to the same liberal democracy found in America. Technologically, Western European and American industry were on familiar terms. The historical traditions of both reflect basically the same cultural values. Economically and financially, Western Europe and the United States were oriented toward free market capitalism (arguments in regards to colonialism and imperialism aside). Acheson thus, turned to the task of restoring and reviving the agriculture, industry, and trade of Europe. A strong Europe would be America’s first defense against a communist Russia:

There developed on our Atlantic coast a community, which has spread across the continent, connected with Western Europe by common institutions and moral and ethical beliefs. Similarities of this kind are not superficial, but fundamental. They are the strongest kind of ties, because they are based on moral conviction, on acceptance of the same values in life...

The Marshall Plan was the direct result of the Truman Doctrine, but the ideas, ideals, and problems that the plan sought to address (like the Doctrine itself) had been accumulating for some time previous. Long before the Second World War had concluded, the need for effective post-war management of world affairs had been anticipated. Though not an economist, Acheson could readily appreciate the complex financial arrangements which would have to be made if there was to be an orderly transition from the war-time economy, having served as head of a committee whose purpose was to develop plans for this very possibility in 1941 (albeit he could not recall a single meeting). The problem with which Acheson was faced was what fiscal policy would best ensure the reinvigoration and restoration of a business climate conducive to stability and at the same time, be compatible with foreign policy and vice versa. Responsible fiscal policy and effective foreign policy would have to be mutually inclusive.

Post-war global economic dislocation was the reality. The most important priority was to ensure that adequate food supplies be distributed as and where needed. The newly minted United Nations would be the first point of coordination for such relief, and for the most part, the financial end of it was underwritten by the United States.
United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) was established for the purpose of relief/food distribution, under the direction of Fiorella La Guardia. In the beginning, both President Truman and Acheson both supported UNRRA’s efforts, with Acheson at one point urging government seizure of needed materials in order to maintain effective levels of assistance: “Emphasizing that he was expressing his personal views, Mr. Acheson told a news conference that the government should go out and take the wheat and flour it needed to make foreign commitments.”

The United Nations’ effort soon ran afoul of United States domestic politics, when it was discovered that certain nations accepting relief/food were doing so at the expense of maintaining and expanding their national armies. Yugoslavia was the case in point with Tito, its communist leader, having done just this. The displeasure of the American electorate was expressed at the polls in the November 1946 mid-term elections in which “the Democrats lost control of congress for the first time in sixteen years.” As a result, support for UNRRA was withdrawn and the United States would establish its own relief/food effort, on its own terms, and in what it perceived to be its interests (and those of its allies).

Throughout early 1947, plans were being prepared to provide U.S.-sponsored relief to replace that which was to be discarded, but on an even broader scale. However, it was not until late spring that anything concrete began developing. Acheson had been working with various other departments on the issue, and within the State Department, Marshall had directed the new Policy Planning Staff to take up the matter (also to be overseen by Acheson). By May the “Marshall Plan” began to take shape. In this plan, the United States would finance European reconstruction by utilizing a combination of grants and loans to stimulate growth and consumption. Relief was not the purpose of the plan. As the plan evolved, it was modified and interpreted to overcome opposition from the American people and their elected representatives.

Acheson was the first to publicly broach the government’s economic assistance initiative – first to the League of Women Voters (Washington, DC), and then to the Delta Council (Cleveland, Mississippi): “It is one of the principle aims of our foreign policy...to use our economic and financial resources...[as]...necessary if we are to preserve our own freedom and our own democratic institutions. It is necessary for national security and it is our duty and privilege as human beings.” Acheson would also take care to alert foreign news correspondents beforehand. These were trial runs to gauge public reaction to a program that would only entail more sacrifice on the part of Americans – the same voters who had just recently expressed their frustration in November. Acheson, the Statesman, had now turned salesman and crusader in the cause of “one of the greatest and most honorable adventures in history.”

On June 5th, Secretary Marshall would announce “The Plan” at Harvard’s commencement ceremonies. Twenty-four days later, Acheson resigned. He returned to private life and to his practice of the law. Yet Acheson did not like being away from government. He likened this period away from public life to the withdrawal period experienced by a drug addict, a period marked by “anguish and unhappiness.” “Public life,” as Acheson described it, “is not only a powerful stimulant but a habit forming one.”

His resignation had been in arrangement since Marshall had taken over as Secretary of State (it was only because of Marshall’s personal request of Acheson that
Acheson remained as long as he did in his position. Robert Lovett became Acheson’s replacement. Acheson returned to private life and the practice of law ostensibly for the purpose of replenishing his dwindling financial reserves, a matter of which he always complained. This arrangement was not to his liking. His professional connections to government work might have been severed, but not his personal ones. Within two weeks of his departure, he was nominated by President Truman to be a member of the Hoover Commission which was to recommend improvements to government executive management (none of its suggestions were ever adopted). In October, Truman would appoint Acheson to the position of Chairman United States Section of the Permanent American-Canadian Defense Board. This appointment was subsequently found to be inconsistent with laws that prohibited private citizens from being appointed to any such position, if in their capacity as a private citizen they could bring legal action against the United States.

By November 1947, the Committee for the Marshall Plan, a lobbying group intent on getting the Marshall Plan adopted, occupied most of Acheson’s time. He was a member of the executive board, but even more important, he was one of the group’s founders “calling for timely and effective American aid for devastated Europe.” Acheson appeared in cities throughout the United States, such as San Francisco, Minneapolis, and Atlantic City, speaking on behalf of the program and the necessity for its adoption. He also appeared on radio discussion panels as an advocate of assistance for Europe. In these presentations, Acheson struck a different pose in his attitude toward Russia.

The great humanitarian effort was beginning to take on a more adversarial tone as regards Russian intentions. A more confrontational approach began to be pursued by the United States. Passage of a bill for European assistance was not only the humane thing to be done, but also something crucial to America’s national security interest. The Committee’s campaign of European recovery was now being interpreted in terms of world peace threatened by Soviet expansionism and domination – “We live in dangerous times because of the decisions of another power.” He would engage the politics of fear to get his point across. Acheson testified before Senate committees in support of the resolution for European aid, stating that “this is the hour of decision; this is the time in which we cannot falter.” Acheson always deplored demagoguery and he was close to the boundary here.

The Foreign Assistance Act was signed by President Truman in April 1948. The following day, the President asked Acheson if he would be the program’s administrator. Acheson declined the request, suggesting Paul Hoffman in his stead. Hoffman accepted, and was readily accepted by the Republicans who would vote for the program’s funding. The Presidential election campaigns were beginning in earnest shortly after this resolution had passed, and since nothing focused political attention more than this quadrennial event and was usually at the expense of all other government business. That was unless, of course, that business may have had a direct bearing on the race for President.

At this time (August 1948), the Alger Hiss case would begin to make its way through history, and Acheson would be inextricably linked to the matter. Alger Hiss had been accused of spying for the Soviet Union while employed by the United States Department of State. He had allegedly used his position to access vital information
which he then turned over to the Soviets. Hiss had denied the accusation, but was subsequently found guilty of a lesser charge of perjury in this matter and sentenced to five years imprisonment. Acheson’s involvement in the case was more than a little circumstantial, and he made his part worse by stating, during his confirmation hearings in January 1949, that Alger Hiss was his friend, and that he would not turn his back on him. The attacks on Acheson because of his association with Hiss cannot be minimized. Demand was made for his dismissal from government service, and although this would never be brought to that conclusion, Acheson found that he had been “discredited, his reputation [had been] damaged, and his political usefulness [had been] greatly damaged.”

The incident did have another effect: it created an atmosphere of fear that was difficult to separate from the business at hand. It forced people, especially those in government, to harden themselves against accusations of being communist sympathizers. Actions and policies would have to have to bear the anti-communist *imprimatur*, or risk rejection, along with their authors. The popular mood did not entertain cordial relations with countries whose ideological predilections were antithetical to those of the United States. Coexistence was also a questionable position to advocate. Fear and hysteria would be the tools of Senator Joseph McCarthy of Wisconsin (again pulling Acheson into a domestic crisis in which he did little but make his part worse), but that is beyond this story.

The United States presidential campaign and election of 1948 was at best a grim prospect for Harry S. Truman, his chance for success seemed very remote. Overcoming an intraparty fight with the Dixiecrats to become the Democratic Party candidate, it was an uphill battle against the Republican nominee, Thomas Dewey. In a close election, which had been all but conceded to Dewey by all the major polling companies (and not a few newspapers even after the fact), Truman won by a narrow margin. This was an especially surprising victory after the 1946 mid-term elections in which the Democrats had suffered a devastating defeat. Following this win, President Truman set about reorganizing his Cabinet. Dean Acheson was his choice to replace George C. Marshall as Secretary of State. The reason Dean Acheson was selected over other prominent candidates (e.g. Chief Justice Fred Vinson; United States Ambassador to Great Britain, Lewis Douglas) was explained later by Acheson himself:

> President Truman’s policies had been evolved with the help of two secretaries of state. I had served them both as their Under Secretary and knew something of the circumstances and problems the Presidents actions had been designed to meet and the need for steadiness and continuity...to be frank, forthright and vigorous in counsel; energetic and loyal in accepting decisions and carrying them out.

Domestic issues tend to dominate national politics and elections. Foreign policy, important though it may be, is considered in terms of its impact on domestic tranquility, and how it comports with the democratic ideals of the republic. As a direct result, most foreign policy activity during these times finds itself relegated to the background. This was the case effecting ongoing international negotiations/discussions as to an Atlantic security pact among Western European countries with an eye to involving the United
States. Talks for establishing an Atlantic mutual defense organization had been well under way by the time Dean Acheson was chosen and confirmed as Secretary of State. However, generally speaking, possible involvement of the United States was not a widely debated issue. The Department of State and the Pentagon discussed amongst themselves, and their European counterparts, the role the United States could play in such a group. In point of fact, there was really little (public) progress made in the development of such a pact beyond what had been proposed at the Brussels Pact in the spring of 1948, a meeting in which the United States played no official role, but did endorse the action.

The United Kingdom, France, and the Benelux countries had met at Brussels and agreed that some sort of alliance was necessary to ensure against “any policy of aggression” that might be generated by another against one of its members. This was to be a military mutual assistance pact, and although Germany was the only nation mentioned as a possible source of aggression in the agreement itself, it was clearly intended to counter Russian policy. Just as obvious as this tacit challenge to Russia’s aggressive expansionism, was the inability of this group to offer any real resistance without the participation of the United States. There was always the United Nations as a possible counterweight to Russian incursions, but the agreement at Brussels reflected little confidence in the former’s ability to effectively deal with the matter of security. Acheson set about immediately to continue discussions for U.S. inclusion in this mutual security pact. There were several hurdles he would have to clear to see the plan to adoption, but he was no stranger to the process.

It is important to note that Acheson never acted without Truman’s acquiescence, if not beforehand then immediately thereafter; Acheson always kept his boss apprised of his doings, and in policy matters, Acheson was always careful that he reflected what the President would need. Both the President’s and Acheson’s public pronouncements on foreign policy were coordinated to avoid the appearance of contradiction, and the President was not hesitant to defer to his Secretary for clarification and explication of State Department programs. It was no different when it came time to involving the United States in the Atlantic treaty pact.

Acheson knew from his experience that it was always better to be too prepared than otherwise, and upon becoming secretary, he would follow this course of action as regards the Atlantic pact. He continued negotiations in private (not in secret) until the moot points began to emerge. The first points to be overcome had to do with the language and intent of the proposed pact. The intent, “a program of mutual protection,” was the easy part, but Acheson had to reconcile the language of the agreement with Constitutional restrictions and requirements and balance this with the security needs and assurances sought by the other signatories. The language of the agreement took somewhat longer to work out because of the numerous agendas which had to be serviced. Basically, the Brussels pact was a reformulation of the treaty of Rio de Janeiro (translated into a European framework) to which the United States was already a signatory, and so that provided Acheson with a working framework.

The Rio Pact between the United States and its western hemispheric allies was concluded in 1947, pledging, among other things, mutual support in the event of attack, and, as mentioned above in this article, the Rio Pact served as a template for the soon to be approved North Atlantic Treaty’s article #5. Under Acheson, certain areas of foreign
diplomacy suffered from benign neglect (the sub-continent of Asia, Africa), but the Latin Americas (Central, South, and Caribbean) were victims of criminal neglect. Russia had evidenced little interest in the area, and this presented no threat to United States security. Consequently, very little American economic, political, or military aid was extended to Latin America. But Acheson’s attitude toward these countries and their peoples leaves little to his credit. It can at best be said that he did not allow them to be put in harm’s way.

Articles #3, #5, and #9 in the final pact proved the most troublesome for Acheson’s campaign to have the pact attain congressional approval. To overcome these difficulties, Acheson made a number of assurances to the Senate Committee. Article #3 indicated the development and maintenance of individual and collective capacity for armed resistance. Acheson stressed that the “mutual aid” called for in this particular article meant that the country would not be expected to supply an exorbitant amount of resources (e.g., medical supplies, “manpower, productive capacity, military equipment, etc.”). Rather, the United States would only have to contribute such resources at “reasonable” levels, levels which were consistent with its geographic location and resources. When queried as to whether this would involve the placement of U.S. troops in Europe, Acheson somewhat disingenuously replied “no.” However, when that possibility did become a reality and he was confronted about it, Acheson would still refuse to accept it as his fault.

Article #5 stipulated that an armed attack against one or more member countries in Europe or North America was to be considered an attack against all member nations, and, as consistent with the Charter of the United Nations, which recognized the right to individual or collective self-defense, member nations could take such action as deemed necessary to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area, to include the use of armed force. Curiously it was the insertion of this last phrase, “to include the use of armed force,” which won Senate support of the article.

Article #9 established and described the composition of the NATO council, which would have the authority to establish a defense committee whose purpose was to implement articles #3 and #5. Furthermore, “each government... [would remain]...the judge of what actions it should take in the fulfillment of this treaty.” This article was interpreted by Acheson (to Congressional representatives) as meaning any declaration of war would be subject to approval (as was consistent with the United States constitution). In this way, the prerogatives of the Congress would not be usurped. In closing his talks with the Senate Committee, Acheson stressed the following:

The essential purpose of the treaty is to fortify and preserve this common way of life. It is designed to contribute to this maintenance of peace by making clear in advance the determination of the parties resolutely and collectively to resist armed attack on any of them. It is further designed to contribute to the stability and well-being of the member nations by removing the haunting sense of insecurity and enabling them to plan and work with confidence in the future. Finally, it is designed to provide the basis for effective collective action to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area if an armed attack should occur.
“Why...entangle our peace and prosperity in the toils of European ambition, rivalship, interest, humor or caprice?” – the foundation of America’s isolationism as expressed by George Washington, and the hallmark of United States foreign policy since the foundation of the Republic was gently pushed aside in April 1949. The United States was now the economic and military leader of the Western powers. From its beginnings as a handful of nations at the Western periphery of Europe who had gathered at Brussels to form their mutual assistance pact, Acheson (not alone of course) had translated the idea into an organization second to none in power and influence. The threat to international stability was not lessened by the establishment of NATO, but rather, substantially increased. The reaction from Russia was as expected negative and this new reality (i.e., NATO) was viewed as but a temporary impediment to Soviet dedication to the spread of communism. It may very well have been Acheson’s intention to build a better peace (and in the long term that is what happened), but it was hardly evident at this point in time. Acheson had helped craft the ultimate “situation of strength” for the United States. He had demonstrated the United States’ willingness to back up its words with action (armed action armed if that was necessary) as well as to preserve peace and ensure freedom. In doing this, Acheson helped America abandon its tradition of isolationism:

The outside world, as it actually existed, was grim and forbidding with heavy burdens and responsibilities attached to power. On the other side contrasting with it, was the memory of the world as it had been, and as one wished it might be. Between must lie error and fault.

Concurrent with the development of the North Atlantic Pact, there had been discussions of a Military Aid Program (during Acheson’s hiatus from government service) which was to be a supplement to the economic provisions of the Marshall Plan. This program was consistent with the North Atlantic Pact, but separate from it. As Acheson described it, “both [North Atlantic Pact and Military Aid Program] flowed from a common source.” The object was to establish “a force in Europe that would preclude a quick victory by sudden marches, backed by an American capability for punishing blows against an aggressor’s home territory.” The illusion of resistance was to be replaced by a reality, which would in turn be reinforced by U.S. atomic weapons. Acheson would see this plan through to its adoption and once again, it would be with the stubborn assistance of Senator Vandenberg of Michigan. The final Congressional approval of the Senate version of the Mutual Defense Assistance Program, the base of the Military Aid Program having been expanded to include United States military interests in Asia, was passed in October of 1949, shortly after the Soviet Union tested its first atomic bomb.

With calm deliberation, Acheson pursued a foreign policy which was gradually becoming more militant. He had grown the North Atlantic pact to almost triple its original membership and not without hard bargaining. American economic and technological support was prioritized, members of NATO receiving first consideration, and then nonmembers. If there was anything left, thus, the Scandinavian (Norway) countries were brought into line. Potential members, as identified by the United States, could choose whatever course of action they deemed in their best interest. However,
Acheson felt obligated to point out to these countries the benefits and consequences which were attendant upon declining the invitation.\textsuperscript{146} It soon became apparent to non-aligned nations that a decision would have to be made as to what would and who could insure national viability. Neutrality would not be acceptable in this ever polarized atmosphere.

However, as Acheson consolidated his diplomatic holdings, he was moving inexorably toward a position in which his options were becoming more and more limited. The conditions he was preparing would begin to dictate his course of action. In an inevitable slide to the right, he would find it difficult to change direction. His foreign policy became less flexible and more predictable. Acheson came to believe that there was only so much that could be done from a defensive posture, and began to anticipate, prepare for, and initiate foreign policy offensives. In Acheson's mind, a reactionary foreign policy which was always on the defensive could not be effective. In addition, such policy appeared weak. As a result, such policy would only serve to work to the Soviets' advantage.

By the close of 1949, the intensity of the Cold War had drawn the lines of conflict as they would remain for its duration. The classic cold war policies and strategies of the competing halves would be set firmly in place during this time. The constant probing by the Soviet Union at what appeared to be weak spots in the Western alliance, and the counterthrust would be the leitmotif of the war's continuation. The West would increase political and diplomatic pressure by and through any means it could take advantage of while the Kremlin would seek to create doubt and disunity among the western allies. There was another element added to this international tension: the possibility of mutual annihilation by means of atomic weapons.\textsuperscript{147} That Russia would at some point enter the atomic age was never in doubt, but it was anticipated that the United States would retain its exclusive access to this technology for some years to come. Russia's successful atom bomb test, coupled with the communist takeover of China, by Mao Zedong, ended the year 1949 badly for Acheson and the West.\textsuperscript{148}

At this time, Western confidence was shaken. In the event of armed conflict between East and West, West Europeans and Americans never doubted that the battle would be nearly over before the West could mount any effective defense. However, they were reasonably certain that they would eventually survive and be able to fight on. United States's atomic weaponry had been seen as providing the time necessary for the West to mobilize a defense. Yet this frame of mind had been altered when it became clear that Russia could counter an attack with atomic weapons of its own.\textsuperscript{149} Such a reality negated the tactical edge of Russia's rivals. The strategy whereby Russian advances could be contained now took on a much different appearance and required immediate attention. In January 1950, President Truman instructed the State Department (Acheson as Secretary of State) and the Department of Defense (Louis Johnson as Secretary) to assess this atomic threat and make policy recommendations per the National Security Council.\textsuperscript{150}

The policy paper which would eventually emerge was known as NSC-68. Its primary author was Paul Nitze, Director of Policy Planning in the State Department, but the final product was the essential Acheson.\textsuperscript{151} Acheson oversaw and controlled the ideas which would or would not be included in the document from the beginning of the process to its final presentation for President Truman's consideration. Specifically, the President
was seeking an assessment of Soviet capabilities in managing fissionable materials and
with possible Russian development of thermonuclear devices. The latter was especially
important because the United States was on the verge of developing its own hydrogen
bomb, a thermonuclear weapon, and beside the moral implications involved in the debate
over development, was the feasibility of diverting the scarce and essential fissionable
materials toward this program, at the expense of atomic armament production. Acheson
addressed these concerns, but he also saw the opportunity to
broaden the scope of the policy's application.

The mechanism of the National Security Council was a rather new innovation
itself, having only been established by means of the National Security Act in 1947. Yet
the Council's introduction as a consultative body was not well received by either the
President or his Secretary of State. Until the outbreak of hostilities in Korea, Truman
rarely attended any of its meetings, believing the Council was only a stalking horse for
congressional legislators who had no business in this area. Likewise, Acheson was wary
of the Council and considered it a threat to the mission of the State Department. As
such, he considered it a nuisance. Yet he also recognized that to abandon the Council to
its own devices would merely create more problems than the bureaucrat in Acheson
would allow. He would not debate the problem of the Security Council, but as George
Marshall would have directed, he managed it.

As information, viewpoints, assessments, recommendations were being assembled
and weighed as to their relevance and efficacy, it became apparent within the State
Department itself that there existed a philosophical divide. George Kennan (former
Director of the Policy Planning staff) and Charles Bohlen argued for a much more
abstruse approach than Acheson thought practical. As a result, Acheson rejected their
approach. In the final version of NSC-68, the subject of the Soviet Union's atomic
capabilities was linked to an overarching armaments plan which would stand in direct
opposition to any military threat from the Kremlin. It was a commitment by the United
States to prepare itself and to use any means necessary to protect its national security and
that of its allies from overt or covert communist incursions. This would include the use
of conventional and atomic weapons. Acheson could see the adoption of this policy in its
wider application to American foreign diplomacy i.e., a Western rearmament program
able to withstand any onslaught from the east. As Acheson construed it, "the purpose of
NSC-68 was to so bludgeon the mass mind of ‘top government’ that not only could the
President make a decision but that the decision be carried out."

The final policy proposal (NSC-68) did not include any cost estimates, but this
was by design. Acheson had purposefully omitted this particular point. Acheson
knew that such military rehabilitation and rearmament would be costly and would require
approximately fifty billion dollars a year into the foreseeable future. After having
consulted knowledgeable sources, he considered the figure "well within [the] national
economic capacity." This expenditure he felt was vital to continued national security,
but he saw that to have included cost estimates in the policy proposal would have worked
against its adoption. Acheson believed that before the decision could be made to adopt
the policy "in principle" the "mice in the Budget Bureau will nibble to death the will to
decide."

Methodically, the paper made and established its points. In its every word,
phrase, and paragraph Acheson’s voice rang loud and clear. Negotiation with the Soviet
Union was steeply discounted and written off as a tool whereby Russia prolonged a problem not to search for resolution, but to see if any advantage was to be gained. As the document stressed, the Kremlin was not interested in words and thus, only action could command the Soviet Union’s attention and respect. Action reaffirmed resolve, anything less reflected weakness. Strong foreign policy would require military strength. Furthermore, the evidence of military strength and the will to use it would ensure the support of the United States’ allies. Essentially, NSC-68 laid out the ultimate containment strategy for it was purposed to be applied to Europe, Asia, Africa, as well as all of the Americas.  

As NSC-68 made clear, there were no gray areas to be considered at this time; everything was in black and white: democracy versus totalitarianism, freedom versus slavery, civilization versus annihilation. “Containment” as a continuing policy was considered an effective strategy with which to counter Soviet expansionism, and one that lent itself to the highly cherished American ideals of fairness and freedom. As implemented, this policy sought change just short of armed conflict. This policy also relied heavily on two other elements: time and military strength. Time allowed for reflection and reconsideration and also allowed for the seeds of self-destruction to take hold. On the other hand, military strength was “in effect a policy of calculated and gradual coercion.” Containment provided not only the opportunity for negotiation, but also a source of pressure on the Kremlin to yield its hardened positions. The two alternative policy extremes of isolationism and preventive war were dismissed as untenable. The former was rejected because it failed to provide safeguards in the event of attack, and the latter was rejected because it was inconsistent and incompatible with American sensibilities—it would have been “morally corrosive” in the eyes of Americans.  

For the authors of NSC-68, there was no doubt that the United States and its allies had the resources, the capital, and the skills necessary to meet the challenge posed by the Soviet Union. However, the authors also recognized that what was needed most was the will to act with a unity of purpose. Acheson was forever bedeviled by liberals who claimed that the only real threat emanated from weaknesses in the western societal, political, and economic structures of Europe. Yet Acheson did not let himself be swayed by the opposition. He remained firm in his position that the United States would be the deciding factor in any contest of wills.  

Political, economic, and military preparedness for an anticipated confrontation with Russia was the end product of NSC-68. Armed conflict was not sought, nor was negotiation to be ignored in an effort to preserve the peace, but all had to stand in readiness for an impending clash—if it was ever to come between the United States/its allies and the Soviet Union. If the United States and its allies were to survive as free liberal democracies, then proactive positions had to be adopted. All of this had to be done “to assure the integrity and vitality of our free society.” Nothing less than a rapid build up of these elements (political, economic, and military) would ensure the free world remained free. Every, and all, resource(s) available to the United States and its allies had to be mobilized “to reduce the power and influence of the Kremlin inside the Soviet Union and other areas under its control.” The stockpiling of atomic weaponry (and thermonuclear devices if they were proven to be effective) would proceed along with conventional weapons rearmament build-up for two reasons. The first reason was that it
was to be reasonably expected that Russia would adopt a similar program. The second reason was that the ever changing demands of armed conflict might require such weapons.

The NSC-68 document had been designed to be a collaborative effort, as directed by President Truman, undertaken by the Department of State and the Department of Defense. And for all intents and purposes, this was what the document was. Nearing completion of the work, a meeting was arranged with the respective staffs and Secretaries to go over the draft. However, when it came time to review the recommendation in its final stages before presentation, the Secretary of Defense, Louis Johnson, took exception to the entire proceeding. He claimed that the project had been conducted without either his knowledge or input and refused to cooperate any further in the discussions. After a heated exchange with Acheson, Johnson left. In his future writings, Acheson would remark, “he [Johnson] was mentally ill...His conduct became too outrageous...some years later he underwent a brain operation.” A telephone call from President Truman settled the matter once and for all. Johnson signed off on the NSC-68 document when it was completed. The following September, Johnson was dismissed from his position as Defense Secretary.

Once the NSC-68 document was completed, Acheson knew that such a plan had to be brought to the public’s attention if it was to receive support because it would require unity and continued sacrifice if it was to be effective. In the final “Notes” appended to NSC-68, Acheson had the last word. He listed seven points that he believed if adhered to by the Soviets might avert an impending crisis. These conditions, if they were met by the Kremlin, could result in “coexistence in reasonable security.” Acheson did make parts of this policy a matter for public discussion and consideration in a number of different venues prior to its being given over to Truman in April of 1950, the same strategy he had employed with the Marshall Plan in 1947–1948.

Appearing as a guest speaker at the University of California, Berkeley, on March 16, 1950, Acheson delivered an address titled “Tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union.” In this speech, he iterated the (aforementioned) seven conditions which if met by the Soviet Union could lessen the tensions between the two countries. First, there must be developed a definition of terms of peace in relation to final settlement with former enemies, Germany, Austria, and Japan. Specifically, these terms had to allow for these former enemy countries to once again enter into the international community as autonomous, self-governing units. These countries could not be allowed to become mere satellites of the Soviet Union. Second, force should be renounced by the Russian authorities as a means of dominating “satellite” countries. Third, the Russians should put an end to their obstructionist tactics within the United Nations and allow the decision making process among the various member countries to go on undisturbed. This meant that the representatives of the Soviet Union in the United Nations had to stop boycotting and walking out during UN meetings. Fourth, the Soviet Union should join with the United States in making arrangements for the control of atomic weapons. Fifth, the Russians should cease all attempts to undermine established governments throughout the world. Sixth, the Soviet Union should take reasonable care to insure the proper treatment of diplomatic representatives. Seventh, Soviet leaders should refrain from systematically distorting to their own peoples the picture of the world outside of their own borders. In particular, the Soviets’ negative propaganda in reference to the United
States had to be discontinued. In closing his speech, Acheson urged his audience to recognize the importance of following through with such proactive foreign policy measures:

The times call for a total diplomacy equal to the task of defense against Soviet expansion and to the task of building the kind of world in which our way of life can flourish. We must continue to press ahead with the building of a free world which is strong in its faith and in its material progress. The alternative is to allow the free nations to succumb one by one to the erosive and encroaching processes of Soviet expansion.166

As Acheson recorded it, NSC-68 became national policy on April 25, 1950.167 However, "little did Acheson imagine that the very kind of aggression against which NSC-68 was designed to function would make possible its implementation." The impetus for the policy’s adoption was supplied by the communists themselves, in the form of the Korean conflict which began in June 1950.168

In referring to Korea, another point in reference to Acheson’s foreign policy should be pointed out. In considering the Truman Doctrine, the Marshall Plan, NATO, NSC-68, and the Mutual Defense Assistance Program, it is hard to dispute the fact that Acheson’s policies (and hence, those of the United States) were “Eurocentric” in the main. Though this may be the case, Acheson did in fact have an extensive Asian policy program with Japan as the centerpiece. Although Acheson may have been a bit late in coming into the game, and that even though he may not have specifically formulated Asian policy, Acheson was well aware of the importance of the Asian area and as such, he appointed capable assistants to devise appropriate policies.

On many occasions, Acheson had reason to be concerned with developments in Asia. One might even speculate that with a little more care and attention to detail, events that occurred in that area of the world may have turned out differently. Undoubtedly, events in China could not have been drastically effected to turn out otherwise; its civil war if concluded with Chiang Kai-Shek the victor still would have been no guarantee of stability on the Asian mainland. There was one exception to what might be seen as benign neglect in the region and that was Japan.

The cornerstone of Acheson’s Asian policy then was the reconstruction of Japan economically, politically, and eventually, militarily – the reintegration of a “stabilized” Asian state in alliance with the United States. In January 1950, Acheson’s speech to the National Press Club detailed the United States “Pacific Defense Perimeter” stretching from Ryukyus to the Philippines. In this chain of containment, Japan would be of primary importance.169 Unfortunately, in this speech Acheson excluded South Korea from this perimeter. Whether the omission of South Korea in Acheson’s speech was a cue to the communists (in North Korea/China/Soviet Union) that South Korea would not be contested and therefore it would be easy to invade, is a matter that is still being debated among historians.

Returning to the story of NSC-68, it should be noted that there are no direct references to specific parts of the NSC-68 document by Acheson, because at the time of his death in 1971 the document had still not been declassified and therefore, comment on its contents was restricted. Yet this does not necessarily mean that Dean Acheson was completely silent on the issue of NSC-68. Flash forward to 1958 when Acheson
published a small tome titled *Power and Diplomacy*. Upon reviewing this work, the word *similitude* immediately would come to mind. The two works (*Power and Diplomacy* and NSC-68) differed substantially in terms of style. In his book, Acheson indulged his preference for history and literature, whereas the authors of NSC-68 (of whom Acheson was one) came with more of an industrial/military complex approach. Although there was eight years of events separating the two works, this time proved useful because it provided Acheson with an opportunity to reflect on the efficacy of strategies, policies, and programs which he had helped initiate while serving in the State Department. Differences aside, the two works, when taken together, show a strong connection to one another, a connection which speaks to Acheson’s views on appropriate foreign policy for the United States.

In the life and political career of Dean Acheson, the story that is told is one of unflagging dedication to safeguarding the interests of the United States. The strategies he employed, the motivations for his actions, the resultant policies, and the far-reaching outcomes of his decisions can best be assessed through his involvement in the formulation of several key pieces of American foreign policy: the Truman Doctrine, the Marshall Plan, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and National Security Council-68. The Mutual Defense Assistance Program may also be added to this list as evidence of Acheson’s involvement and influence on the development of United States foreign policy.

The programs that Acheson helped create during the years from 1947 to 1950 are some of the most significant ones to occur during the Cold War period when the United States and the Soviet Union were engaged in a tense, prolonged confrontation in which their ideas and ideals were tested and re-tested. Although in the end the United States would prove victorious in this clash of world powers, such a triumph was not preordained. To overcome their communist enemy, the United States had to engage in a process of policy making which required a significant amount of time and commitment. Acheson would be at the forefront of these policy changes, guiding and leading America in its move from a foreign policy position of benign coexistence to aggressive containment.

While working in the State Department, Acheson personally initiated, directed, and introduced policies. When not in the employ of the United States government, Acheson was actively engaged in doing whatever his part demanded to ensure that programs were carried forward. In many instances, his part demanded that he appear before Congressional committees in support of policies, such as the Marshall Plan and NATO, to ensure their adoption.

In reflecting upon Acheson’s contributions to American foreign policy, one sees that his policies have served his country’s needs well. The path taken in these instances were never easy or simple ones, and Acheson recognized that:

> The road to freedom and to peace which I have pictured is a hard one. The times in which we live must be painted in the somber values of Rembrandt. The background is dark, the shadows deep. Outlines are obscure. The central point, however, glows with light; and, though it often brings out the glint of steel. It touches colors of unimaginable beauty. For
us, that central point is the growing unity of free men the world over. This is our shaft of light, our hope, and our promise.

After such a statement, who could not respect such a man and the work he engaged in for the United States?

3 Beisner, *Dean Acheson*, 97.
7 Ibid., 132.
8 Ibid., 162.
9 Ibid., 163.
11 Ibid., 188.
12 Chace, *Acheson*, 188.
13 Ibid., 192.
15 Beisner, *Dean Acheson*, 12.
16 Ibid., 227.
17 Acheson, *Present at the Creation*, 18.
18 Ibid., 38.
21 Ibid., 97-99.
23 Acheson, *Present at the Creation*, 120.
24 Ibid., 121.
25 Ibid., 122.
28 Ibid., 162-163.
29 Ibid., 18.
30 Truman Library
31 Acheson, *Present at the Creation*, 150.
32 Chace, *Acheson*, 150.
33 Beisner, *Dean Acheson*, 45.
34 Chace, *Acheson*, 150.
36 Acheson, *Present at the Creation*, 143.
37 Ibid., 144.
38 Ibid., 151.
39 Ibid., 153.
40 Ibid., 154.
41 Ibid., 156.
42 Ibid., 152.
43 Ibid., 149 & 195.
44 Ibid., 211.
45 Ibid., 211.
46 Ibid., 246.
47 Chace, Acheson, 168.
48 McLellan, Dean Acheson: The State Department Years, 122.
49 Ibid., 110 & 114.
50 Dean Acheson, An American Vista (London: Hamish Hamilton Ltd., 1956), 82.
51 Ibid., 112.
52 McLellan, Dean Acheson: The State Department Years, 107.
53 Ibid., 104.
55 Acheson, Present at the Creation, 217.
58 Acheson, Present at the Creation, 218.
59 Ibid., 218.
60 Ibid., 218.
61 Ibid., 219
62 Ibid. 220.
64 Acheson, Present at the Creation, 223.
65 Ibid., 223.
66 Ibid., 224.
68 Acheson, Present at the Creation, 225.
69 Chace, Acheson, 167.
70 Acheson, Present at the Creation, 219.
71 Dean Acheson, This Vast External Realm (New York: W.W. Norton & Co. Inc., 1973), 81.
73 Acheson, Power and Diplomacy, 84.
74 Acheson, Present at the Creation, 260.
75 Acheson, Power and Diplomacy, 7-8.
76 Acheson, Present at the Creation, 265.
79 Acheson, Present at the Creation, 164.
81 McLellan, Dean Acheson: The State Department Years, 103.
83 McLellan, Dean Acheson: The State Department Years, 103.
84 Acheson, Present at the Creation, 260.
86 Acheson, Present at the Creation, 228.
87 Ibid., 229.
88 Ibid., 228.
89 Bundy, The Patter of Responsibility, 50.
90 Ibid., 50-51.
91 Acheson, Present at the Creation, 228.
92 Ibid., 230.
93 Ibid., 239.
94 Ibid., 213.
95 Ibid., 236.
96 Ibid., 239.
100 Acheson, *Present at the Creation*, 240.
108 Ibid., 242.
110 New York Times, January 26, 1950, pg. 1
111 Beisner, *Dean Acheson*, 289.

McLellan *Dean Acheson: The State Department Years*, 142.

Acheson, *Present at the Creation*, 252.


Acheson, *Present at the Creation*, 252.

Perlmutter, “The ‘Neo-Realism’ of Dean Acheson,” 113.

Acheson, *Present at the Creation*, 249.

Ibid., 266.


McLellan *Dean Acheson: The State Department Years*, 145.

Acheson, *Present at the Creation*, 137.

Beisner, *Dean Acheson*, 133.

Acheson, *Present at the Creation*, 280.

Beisner, *Dean Acheson*, 568.

Ibid., 569.


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Chace, *Acheson*, 270.


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Ibid., 308.

Ibid., 308.

Ibid., 311.

Ibid., 313.


Ibid., 37.
149 Ibid., 86.
150 NSC-68, Terms of Reference. www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/nsc-68-1
151 Beisner, Dean Acheson, 122.
152 Ibid., 122.
153 Ibid., 124.
154 Acheson, Present at the Creation, 347.
155 Ibid., 374.
156 Ibid., 374.
157 Ibid., 377.
158 Ibid., 377.
159 NSC-68 www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/nsc-68-1
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