Strategic Air Warfare and Nuclear Strategy: The Formulation of Military Policy in the Truman Administration, 1945-1950

Patrick William Steele, Marquette University

Date of Award
Spring 2010

Document Type
Dissertation

Degree Name
Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

Department
History

First Advisor
Avella, Steven M.

Second Advisor
Marten, James

Third Advisor
Zeps, Michael J.

Abstract
This work analyzes the military decision making within the Truman administration that culminated in the purchases of aircraft and the establishment of a virtual nuclear only strategy. When Harry S. Truman became President in April 1945, the United States Army Air Force (USAAF) was in the formative stage of a firebombing campaign that attempted to burn the Japanese out of the war by targeting the civilian population. Four months later, the use of nuclear bombs ushered in the atomic age and completely altered the military and political decision-making processes within the administration.

Despite evidence to the contrary about the efficacy of strategic bombing, the military view of the atomic bomb as an ultimate arbiter of warfare whose use virtually guaranteed victory on American terms was immediately embraced across all the armed forces. The chapters of the dissertation describe the evolution of airpower as a strategy and the fundamental differences between the branches of the armed forces regarding funding, missions, and responsibilities in the new atomic age. These substantive and structural problems manifested in arguments over Unification and the subsequent creation of the National Military Establishment. Truman attempted to provide direction to the services through the creation of the President's Air Policy Commission but unfortunately, civilian and military leadership within the Air Force and the Navy brought their strategic disputes into the public arena. These culminated in a congressional investigation over weapon systems, strategies, and the supposed "Revolt of the Admirals" in October 1949.

To secure funding and a critical role in the American defense during this era, the Air Force and the Navy supported a respective series of weapons and strategies that were ill prepared to adjust to changing American policies in any war short of a global nuclear war. Funding for a single-weapon strategy remained even as other conventional weapons were being removed in the spirit of austerity that were the hallmark of the defense spending of the Truman Administration from 1945 until 1950.
THE STRATEGY OF CONTAINMENT by John Lewis Gaddis. 1 / the postwar world, 1945. 1. SWNCC 282: Basis for the Formulation of a U.S. Military Policy September 19. 1945. 2. SC-169b: Action on Jow Chiefs of Staff Statement on United States Military Policy November 16. 1945. 2 / containment: the doctrine, 1946-48. 3. Moscow Embassy Telegram #511, "The Long Telegram" February 22, 1946. 4. American Relations with the Soviet Union: A Report to the President by the Special Counsel to the President September 24, 1946. 5. JCS 1769/1: United States Assistance to Other Countries from the Standpoint The Air Force argued that strategic air power—the long-range bomber carrying nuclear weapons—could be the key factor in any future major conflict. It wanted funds to support 70 combat groups as well as exclusive use of atomic weapons. Although President Truman set a ceiling of $14.4 billion for FY 1950, the services initially proposed $29 billion, later reduced to $23.6 billion. These included the formulation of long-range and short-range strategic plans, the development of an integrated NME budget for FY 1950, the definition of service roles and missions, the coordination of service procurement efforts, and the establishment of additional overseas unified commands. The policy emphasized reliance on strategic nuclear weapons to deter potential threats, both conventional and nuclear, from the Eastern Bloc of nations headed by the Soviet Union.

Contents. 1 History. Truman's advisers believed that Soviet military capabilities would reach a maximum relative to those of the United States and its allies in the mid-1950s.[3]. Psychological warfare was a nonviolent technique of combating the Soviets that especially appealed to Eisenhower, with the goal of flooding Communist states with anti-Soviet propaganda.[4]. Although strategic air power attained a lower level than the Truman administration had projected, it became the centerpiece of U.S. security thinking, embodied in the doctrine of "Massive Retaliation."