

# EISENHOWER AND THE NEW LOOK

Dwight D. Eisenhower's election in November 1952 presented the Joint Chiefs of Staff with the prospect of the most radical changes in American defense policy since World War II. A fiscal conservative, Eisenhower saw the heavy military expenditures of the Truman years bankrupting the country. Assuming that the Cold War might go on indefinitely, he sought to develop a sound, yet cheaper, defense posture the United States could maintain over the long haul. The result was a strategic concept known as the "New Look," which incorporated a broader than ever reliance on nuclear weapons and nuclear technology. Indeed, by the time Eisenhower was finished, military policy and nuclear weapons policy were practically synonymous. Some called it simply "more bang for the buck."

The first military professional to occupy the White House since Ulysses S. Grant, Eisenhower was, like Grant, a national hero. Commander of the Allied force that had invaded France and defeated Nazi Germany on the western front in World War II, he had served after the War as Army Chief of Staff, president of Columbia University, unofficial Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and NATO Supreme Commander in Europe. To many Americans, he seemed the natural leader to guide them through the increasingly dense thicket of the Cold War.

Eisenhower's advent had a larger and more lasting impact on the JCS than any Commander in Chief until Ronald Reagan in the 1980s. Entering office with unrivaled experience in military affairs and the advantage of personally knowing how the JCS system operated, he knew first-hand how inter-Service competition and parochial interests could thwart agreement among the chiefs on common military policies. Internal differences, he later observed, "tended to neutralize the advisory influence they should have enjoyed as a body."<sup>1</sup> While the JCS had pulled themselves together and worked fairly well as a team during the Korean War, they had functioned more or less as their predecessors had done in World War II—with elastic budgets and under the pressure of events that concealed their internal rivalries and frictions. Anticipating an end to the hostilities in Korea, Eisenhower foresaw a

postwar transition period of spending cuts and changes in strategy and force structure leading to renewed inter-Service strife and competition.

### THE 1953 REORGANIZATION

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In Eisenhower's view, revising the Nation's defense strategy and improving the effectiveness and efficiency of the Joint Chiefs went hand in hand. Knowing that rapid and radical changes could cost him the cooperation of the chiefs and of their supporters on Capitol Hill, he started slowly with modest adjustments. The blueprint he used was a Defense-wide reorganization derived from suggestions offered by former Secretary of Defense Robert A. Lovett and the recommendations of an advisory panel headed by Nelson A. Rockefeller, Eisenhower's protégé. Presented to Congress in April 1953, these changes, known as Reorganization Plan Number 6, took effect under an Executive order in June and required no further legislative action in the absence of congressional objections.

One of Eisenhower's principal objectives was to strengthen the powers of the Chairman, whose *de facto* role and authority increasingly outweighed the statutory description of his duties. To bring theory and reality more into line, the 1953 reorganization gave the CJCS the beginnings of his own power base by conferring on him authority to manage the work of the Joint Staff and to approve the selection of its members. To get the JCS to concentrate on their advisory and planning functions, the President removed the JCS from the operational chain of command by ending the practice, sanctioned under the 1948 Key West Agreement, that had allowed the Joint Chiefs to name one of their members as the executive agent for each unified or specified command. Henceforth, it would be up to the Service Secretaries to designate these executive agents. The President said that in taking these actions he intended to "fix responsibility along a definite channel of accountable civilian officials as intended by the National Security Act." Eisenhower would have gone further in reforming the JCS, but he recognized that the attempt would have aroused vigorous opposition on Capitol Hill, where the prospect of a more powerful Chairman and a stronger, more independent Joint Staff continued to conjure images of a "Prussian general staff."<sup>2</sup>

The appointment of a new set of Service chiefs and a new Chairman accompanied these structural changes. The "old" chiefs who were in place at the end of the Truman years—Bradley, Army Chief of Staff J. Lawton Collins, Chief of Naval Operations William M. Fechteler, and Air Force Chief of Staff Hoyt S. Vandenberg—were all either close personal friends of Eisenhower or well known to him by reputation. Many of the President's key political supporters, however, accused them

of having aided and abetted a no-win strategy in Asia and run-away defense spending at home. Since most of their terms expired in the spring and summer of 1953, it was easy for the President to make a nearly clean sweep. The “new” chiefs included Admiral Arthur W. Radford, previously Commander in Chief, Pacific (CINCPAC), as Chairman, General Nathan F. Twining as Air Force Chief of Staff, General Matthew B. Ridgway, Eisenhower’s successor at SHAPE, as Army Chief of Staff, and Admiral Robert B. Carney, formerly the commander of NATO forces in Southern Europe, as Chief of Naval Operations. The only holdover was General Lemuel C. Shepherd, Jr., Commandant of the Marine Corps, who served on the JCS in a limited capacity under legislation enacted in June 1952 allowing the Commandant to participate in JCS deliberations when matters of direct concern to the Marine Corps were under consideration.<sup>3</sup>

Radford’s appointment as Chairman sent a powerful political message intended to promote inter-Service unity and cooperation. A naval aviator, Radford had opposed Service unification after World War II and spoken out repeatedly against Louis Johnson’s defense policies during the 1949 “Revolt of the Admirals.” While selecting a one-time opponent of unification raised more than a few eyebrows, Radford assured the President that his views on defense organization had changed and that he was now fully behind the aims of the National Security Act. Beyond this, he and Eisenhower shared a similar concern for the long-term effects of excessive military spending. Radford’s familiarity with the Far East was a further asset at a time when that part of the world seemed to produce one major foreign-policy problem after another. To make the Joint Chiefs into a more effective corporate body, free of Service biases, Eisenhower admonished the admiral to lead the way by divorcing himself “from exclusive identification with the Navy.” As an incentive, Eisenhower promised that Radford would have clearer responsibilities and greater authority than his predecessor, General Omar Bradley. Radford would have preferred to be Chief of Naval Operations, and at times he likened his role as CJCS to that of “a committee chairman,” as if it were a demotion. But he worked hard on the President’s behalf, got along well with Eisenhower’s other senior advisors, and did a commendable job of rising above Service interests.<sup>4</sup>

Less successful were Radford’s efforts to instill these virtues in his JCS colleagues and forge a consensus among them on basic plans embodying administration policies. During the Indochina and Quemoy-Matsu crises of 1954–1955, he tried to steer the JCS in the direction of military responses that conformed to declared White House positions on the use of nuclear weapons; for his efforts, he wound up being cast in the awkward guise of “party whip.”<sup>5</sup> Despite the increased authority the Chairman exercised under Eisenhower, Radford actually had limited

## COUNCIL OF WAR

influence and control over strategic planning, the Joint Chiefs' key function, which remained a corporate responsibility. Integral to the allocation of resources, strategic planning was a continuing source of inter-Service rivalry. Interminable haggling over phraseology as well as the "force tabs" attached to war plans to lay out the size and composition of forces needed to carry out missions became commonplace.

Unable to agree on a single unified strategy, the JCS resorted to compromises built on broad statements of tasks and objectives that gave something to each Service. Out of this process (known derisively as "log-rolling") the Joint Strategic Capabilities Plan (JSCP) emerged as little more than a yearly inventory of forces available to each joint command in an emergency, while the mid-range Joint Strategic Objectives Plan (JSOP) resembled a compilation of individual Service requirements, assembled in no order of priority. Intended to help the Secretary of Defense and the President project future budgetary needs, the JSOP routinely fell short of its goal and quickly acquired the reputation of being a "wish list" of Service requirements. Occasionally, in this and other areas, Admiral Radford was successful in intervening to mend "splits." But by and large, his most effective weapon in overcoming Service differences was to digest the views of his colleagues and convey them to the President in his own interpretation of JCS advice.<sup>6</sup>

In view of his background and experience, Eisenhower did not hesitate to take matters into his own hands, behaving as Secretary of Defense, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, and National Security Advisor all in one. Aware of JCS limitations, he frequently took over military planning and issued detailed guidance and direction as the situation warranted. All signs are that he enjoyed these tasks. Yet he still looked to his Secretaries of Defense to attend to day-to-day Pentagon chores and expressed irritation when they failed to measure up.<sup>7</sup> The three who served under him as Secretary of Defense—Charles E. Wilson, Neil H. McElroy, and Thomas S. Gates, Jr.—were business executives in private life and more adept at administration and fiscal management than military affairs. With the exception of Gates, who was Under Secretary and Secretary of the Navy before becoming Secretary of Defense in 1959, their experience in defense matters was exceedingly limited. Wilson, the first, had the hardest time. Formerly the head of General Motors, he was unfamiliar with the ways of the Pentagon and struggled to carry out the President's policies, many of which involved unpopular budget cuts. With Wilson obviously needing help, Eisenhower spent an inordinate amount of time on defense matters to help shore up the Secretary's position, and in the process established a pattern of hands-on involvement that lasted throughout his Presidency.<sup>8</sup>

The Joint Chiefs' most frequent contacts with the President were through the National Security Council, which Eisenhower used as his principal forum for

debating and deciding high-level policy. As such, the NSC was a convenient mechanism for double-checking the Chiefs' advice and requirements. The practice that had developed during the Truman years of filtering JCS recommendations through the NSC remained in effect under Eisenhower and became even further institutionalized with the creation of new coordinating mechanisms—an interagency Planning Board, similar to the NSC Senior Staff of Truman's day but with broader powers to review and refine actions going up the "policy hill" to the President and the NSC; and an Operations Coordinating Board (OCB), to deal with intelligence operations and assure the implementation of NSC decisions. All functioned under the discreet and watchful eye of a Special Assistant for National Security Affairs who reported directly to the President. The net effect was a highly structured system of integrated policy review and collective decisionmaking that subjected JCS and Service requests and recommendations to minute scrutiny.<sup>9</sup>

Over time, the Joint Chiefs became highly proficient at working within this system and making it serve their needs. One benefit for them was that it provided reliable lines of communication with other government agencies, especially the State Department. Extremely useful to the chiefs was the administration's practice of conducting annual reviews of basic national security policy, resulting in comprehensive statements of policy that established guidelines and priorities for the development of military and related programs. Exceedingly detailed, these national policy papers emerged only after lengthy discussion and negotiation, with significant inputs from the Treasury and Bureau of the Budget. After laying out the administration's overall policy objectives, these papers virtually guaranteed that once a Service program was adopted, it would enjoy indefinite funding and political support. A major criticism of this system was that it allowed little flexibility in the face of changing international conditions and defense needs. But it suited the Services and the Joint Chiefs by providing them with a predictable platform for assessing requirements and a viable rationale for justifying their claims on resources.

## ENDING THE KOREAN WAR

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Eisenhower's first order of business as President was to fulfill his campaign promise and bring the Korean War to a swift and honorable conclusion. Stalemated since mid-1951, the war was a growing drain on troops, resources, and the patience of the American people. For the Truman administration, it had become an onerous political liability. Lest the effects linger, Eisenhower wanted an expeditious settlement that would allow the United States to withdraw some, if not most, of its forces. Out of the ensuing efforts to develop a strategy for ending the war emerged many of the

key policy strands for the new administration's subsequent basic national security policy—the “New Look.”

When Eisenhower took office in January 1953, the principal obstacle to an armistice was the prisoner of war issue. Even though the 1949 Geneva Convention called for mandatory repatriation of POWs, the Truman administration, acting on JCS advice, had embraced a nonforcible repatriation policy. Behind this policy was the chiefs' desire to avoid repeating the unpleasant experience after World War II when the Western allies forcibly repatriated sizable numbers of POWs held by the Germans to the Soviet Union. Reports reaching the West later revealed that Stalin executed many of these POWs and threw others into labor camps. During the Korean conflict, screening done by the UNC confirmed that over 75 percent of the Chinese POWs and a lesser percentage of North Koreans were unwilling to return voluntarily. Having had these figures accidentally revealed to them, Chinese and North Korean negotiators summarily rejected nonforcible repatriation. The armistice talks bogged down and on October 8, 1952, the U.S. chief negotiator, Major General William K. Harrison, Jr., USA, declared an indefinite recess until the Communists tendered a “constructive proposal.” Almost immediately, the fighting escalated.<sup>10</sup>

As early as February 1952, the Joint Chiefs had begun to examine alternative courses of action in case the negotiations failed or became prolonged. By the following autumn, the consensus within the JCS organization in Washington and at UNC headquarters in the Far East was that an armistice was unlikely as long as North Korean and Chinese forces continued to occupy the heavily fortified defensive positions they had constructed across the Korean Peninsula. To break the impasse, both the Joint Strategic Plans Committee (JSPC) and General Mark W. Clark, USA, the commander of UN forces in Korea (CINCUNC) recommended a buildup of forces and a large-scale offensive to “carry on the war in new ways never yet tried in Korea.”<sup>11</sup> The JSPC's plan incorporated the use of tactical atomic weapons against enemy targets in Korea, China, and Manchuria. Initially, Clark did not include nuclear weapons in his planning. Upon learning of the nuclear provisions in the JSPC's plan, however, he asked for authority to use them if the need arose. In the past, the JCS had shied away from recommending the use of nuclear weapons in Korea for political reasons and because of the limited size of the U.S. nuclear stockpile. But by late 1952, with bomb production up to over 400 assemblies per year, these supply restrictions were less inhibiting.<sup>12</sup>

The Joint Chiefs reviewed General Clark's plans and assured him that they would be given due consideration.<sup>13</sup> The previous summer, anticipating events, the JCS had initiated a buildup of nonnuclear components at storage facilities on Guam

and aboard aircraft carriers operating in the Western Pacific.<sup>14</sup> With President Truman's knowledge and approval, the JCS had also taken steps to identify stockpiles of mustard gas and nerve agents at storage depots in the United States for possible use in dislodging the Chinese and North Koreans from their caves and bunkers along the front line in Korea. But with a new administration about to take office, the JCS held further measures affecting a buildup in abeyance.<sup>15</sup>

Meantime, accompanied by General Bradley, Admiral Radford, and Secretary of Defense-designate Wilson, President-elect Eisenhower went on a fact-finding tour of Korea in early December 1952. He returned convinced that stepped-up military pressure held the key to ending the conflict. Soon after the inauguration, he terminated the U.S. naval blockade of Taiwan, ostensibly "unleashing" Chiang Kai-shek to wreak havoc on mainland China, and gave the nod to intensify a conventional bombing campaign against North Korea that the Air Force had launched the previous October. Among the targets the President authorized were hydroelectric power plants on the Yalu River, industrial facilities in congested urban areas, and irrigation dams used in rice production, nearly all of which the previous administration had treated as off limits to bombing for humanitarian reasons.<sup>16</sup>

Between March and May 1953, Eisenhower considered further ratcheting up the military pressure in Korea and asked the Pentagon to come up with plans for a more aggressive campaign involving nuclear weapons, depending "on the advantage of their use on military targets."<sup>17</sup> Uneasy over the direction in which the President seemed headed, the JCS initially hesitated to propose a single course of action and offered instead a choice of six escalating options based on the planning done by the JSPC and CINCUNC. At the low end of the scale was a continuation of the existing level of military activity, followed by successive stages of stepped-up military pressure, culminating in a "major offensive" extending beyond the Korean Peninsula. At this point, all restrictions on the use of chemical and nuclear weapons would be removed.<sup>18</sup> The Planning Board tendered a slightly reworked version of these options (NSC 147) to the NSC in early April, but the Council sent it back with instructions that the JCS provide a specific course of action.<sup>19</sup>

Finally, on May 20, 1953, General Bradley presented an oral report to the NSC that left Eisenhower and the other Council members stunned. Assuming the primary goal to be a military solution, Bradley was convinced that the United States might be "forced to use every type of weapon that we have."<sup>20</sup> Accordingly, he outlined a plan for an all-out offensive in Korea, spearheaded by the use of chemical and tactical nuclear weapons, that would involve taking out targets in China and Manchuria. "We may also," he warned, "be risking the outbreak of global war." In his memoirs, Bradley suggested that the President had known the gist of the chiefs'

## COUNCIL OF WAR

proposals for some time and that he and Eisenhower had discussed these matters privately on previous occasions. Still, the President seemed taken aback by the aggressive tone of the Chairman's presentation and treated it as a hypothetical inquiry, to be acted upon "if circumstances arose which would force the United States to an expanded effort in Korea." Among the numerous issues yet to be addressed, he mentioned the "disinclination of our allies to go along with any such proposal as this" and the obvious need "to infiltrate these ideas" into their minds.<sup>21</sup>

While Eisenhower elected to hold a major escalation of the Korean War in abeyance, he still believed that military pressure held the key to a truce, and in the weeks following Bradley's presentation to the NSC, conventional air attacks against Communist targets in the north intensified. Irrigation dams received the most attention.<sup>22</sup> Through diplomatic channels, meanwhile, and at the armistice talks in Korea, U.S. representatives served notice that even "stronger" measures were in the offing. These "muffled warnings," as political scientist McGeorge Bundy later characterized them, were an unmistakable threat to use nuclear weapons, but whether they had the impact on the Communist side that Eisenhower claimed remains a matter of conjecture.<sup>23</sup> In any case, the negotiations showed sufficient promise of resolving the POW and other issues for Eisenhower to hold further threats in abeyance and to turn his attention to securing the cooperation of South Korea's recalcitrant President Syngman Rhee.<sup>24</sup> Finally, in July the two sides signed an armistice which avoided the forced repatriation of prisoners and left Korea divided along a demilitarized zone at approximately the same line as where the fighting began in 1950.

The ceasefire brought a respite but did not end JCS involvement in Korean affairs. Although the fighting subsided, tensions between north and south remained high, causing the JCS to keep the situation under constant and close review. For years after the armistice, the United States maintained about 50,000 air and ground forces in Korea under a UN command, while deploying large naval forces nearby and funding a military assistance program to train and equip a South Korean army of 700,000 troops. Next to Western Europe, Korea hosted the largest permanent overseas concentration of U.S. forces during the Cold War. In an increasingly common outcome of Cold War confrontations, neither side scored a clear-cut victory during the Korean conflict, nor did either side suffer a clear-cut defeat.

## A NEW STRATEGY FOR THE COLD WAR

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Ending the Korean War was the final major task of the "old" chiefs. To the "new" chiefs who succeeded them in the summer of 1953 fell the job of converting the



Armed Forces to a peacetime footing. Despite their ambiguous contributions to ending the Korean War, Eisenhower increasingly viewed nuclear weapons as the key to the country's future security. Stepped-up production of fissionable materials initiated during the Truman years and design improvements leading to new, more purpose-tailored weapons, from high-yield bombs for strategic use to tactical and battlefield weapons, created unprecedented opportunities that Eisenhower proposed to exploit to the fullest. Given the choice, he probably would have preferred a balanced defense posture, in which atomic weapons and conventional forces figured on a roughly equal basis. But from his recent experience in defense matters, as acting chairman of the Joint Chiefs in the late 1940s and as SACEUR, he lacked confidence in being able to overcome the fiscal and political difficulties, either at home or abroad, that raising and maintaining a peacetime conventional force of sufficient size entailed.<sup>25</sup>

Like Truman, Eisenhower viewed a strong defense and a sound economy as the twin pillars of national security. A fiscal conservative, he recoiled at the budget deficits that had accumulated under his predecessor and attributed them in large part to profligate military spending. He pledged to follow "a new policy which would continue to give primary consideration to the external threat but would no longer ignore the internal threat" of an economy weakened by heavy defense expenditures.<sup>26</sup> Assuming a Cold War of indefinite duration, the President rejected the radical changes in national strategy suggested in a high-level study (Project SOLARIUM) carried out during the early months of his Presidency, in favor of continuing the practice of containing Soviet power and influence.<sup>27</sup> Eisenhower also wanted to avoid the "feast or famine" fluctuations in defense programs that the Armed Forces had experienced since the 1920s by establishing a stable level of military spending. To do so, he abandoned the Truman administration's practice of pegging defense programs to a "year of maximum danger," and opted for a military posture that the country could sustain over the "the long pull" without jeopardizing the economy. For this purpose, increased reliance on nuclear weapons was almost ideal.<sup>28</sup>

Eisenhower found the Joint Chiefs to be among the most persistent and irritating obstacles he faced in carrying out his plans. Insisting that the current posture was "sound and adequate," they resisted cuts in conventional strength and argued that uncertainty over the use of nuclear weapons compelled them to retain substantial general purpose forces. Threatening the use of nuclear weapons was one thing; actually carrying through was quite another. The JCS acknowledged the primary importance of nuclear weapons in assuring national security, but wanted a clearer weapons-use policy, removal of the remaining impediments imposed during the Truman years on the military's access to nuclear weapons, and preservation of viable

## COUNCIL OF WAR

conventional capabilities as backup in the event of a Soviet nuclear attack.<sup>29</sup> While the United States continued to hold a comfortable lead in atomic bombs, intelligence estimates available to the JCS indicated that the Soviets were catching up and that they would have enough weapons by the mid-1960s to match the United States in destructive power.<sup>30</sup> Wholly unexpected was the Soviet detonation in August 1953 of a 400-kiloton thermonuclear device—significantly smaller in explosive power than the U.S. test of the previous November, but with design characteristics that gave the Soviets a deliverable hydrogen bomb (about the same physical size as a “Fat Man” implosion bomb) ahead of the United States.<sup>31</sup>

Eisenhower was well aware that the course he proposed had drawbacks and limitations. But he also knew, as did the Joint Chiefs, that the accuracy of intelligence on Soviet capabilities was questionable and subject to change depending on the available information and how the Intelligence Community interpreted it.<sup>32</sup> Barring an arms control breakthrough, Eisenhower accepted the proliferation of nuclear weapons as essentially unavoidable and sought to turn it to best advantage. He believed the quickest and easiest way was “to consider the atomic bomb as simply another weapon in our arsenal.”<sup>33</sup> To those who argued that crossing the nuclear threshold risked all-out war, he replied that applying “tactical” atomic weapons against military targets was no more likely to trigger a “big war” than the use of conventional 20-ton block-busters.<sup>34</sup> Effective deterrence, he believed, meant having not only the capability but also the will to use nuclear weapons. The internal debate surrounding these issues and their impact on defense policy stretched from the summer into the fall of 1953 and revealed sharp differences of opinion. But in the end, the President’s views prevailed, at least on paper. The upshot was a new basic national security policy (NSC 162/2) authorizing the Armed Forces to treat nuclear weapons “for use as other munitions” and to plan their force posture accordingly, with “emphasis on the capability of inflicting massive retaliatory damage by offensive striking power.”<sup>35</sup>

Admiral Radford publicly described the administration’s defense policy as a “New Look” in national security; others, seizing on language used by Secretary of State John Foster Dulles in a 1954 speech, called it “massive retaliation.” Eisenhower considered such descriptions misleading because they implied a more sweeping change in the composition of the Armed Forces than he intended.<sup>36</sup> Rather than restructure the military establishment, he wanted to make it more efficient, more up-to-date with the latest technologies, and more economical. “His goal,” historian John Lewis Gaddis observed, “was to achieve the maximum possible deterrence of communism at the minimum possible cost.”<sup>37</sup>

Most of the savings Eisenhower achieved occurred during his first 2 years in office and came largely from budgets inherited from Truman, whose own plans called for similar reductions at the end of the Korean War. Once the Korean War “bulge” disappeared, Eisenhower faced steadily mounting costs owing to inflation and pressures arising from intelligence estimates pointing to greater-than-expected increases in Soviet strategic air and missile capabilities. Using essentially the same budgeting techniques as the Truman administration, Eisenhower insisted that military requirements fit within fixed expenditure ceilings. To make the money go further, he stretched out procurement and the implementation of approved programs. His major accomplishment was to reduce the rate of growth in military spending, not its overall size. As the largest item in the Federal budget, national security consumed on average about 10 percent of the country’s GNP during Eisenhower’s presidency. At the end of the administration’s 8 years in office, total obligational authority for defense stood at just over \$44 billion, roughly the same as when Eisenhower entered the Presidency.<sup>38</sup>

The principal beneficiary under the New Look was the Air Force, whose Strategic Air Command reaped the largest rewards. Force planning for the post-Korean War period done in the waning days of the Truman administration had pointed in this direction.<sup>39</sup> Under Eisenhower’s more restricted budgets, the process accelerated. Though Air Force leaders recoiled at some of the funding cuts Eisenhower initially imposed, they soon found themselves enjoying a privileged position. On average, the Air Force received 46.4 percent of the defense budget during the Eisenhower years, compared with 28.3 percent for the Navy and Marines and 25.3 percent for the Army. During this same period, strategic forces (predominantly those under SAC) increased their claim on the total defense budget from 18 percent to nearly 27 percent.<sup>40</sup>

A formidable deterrent, the Strategic Air Command now became the country’s undisputed first line of defense and retaliation. Relying primarily on manned bombers during the 1950s, SAC retired its propeller-driven B-29s and B-50s by the middle of the decade in favor of faster jet aircraft: the medium range B-47 and the intercontinental B-52, which replaced the problem-plagued B-36. By the time the Eisenhower administration left office, SAC had an operating force of 1,400 B-47s and 600 B-52s, supported by 300 KC-135 jet tankers for aerial refueling. Early B-52 models (the A through F series) had an unrefueled range of more than 6,000 miles while carrying as many as four gravity-fall atomic bombs; later models (the G and H series) had an unrefueled range of 7,500 to 8,000 miles and could carry up to eight nuclear weapons.<sup>41</sup>

## COUNCIL OF WAR

SAC's main weakness during the 1950s was the increasing vulnerability of its bombers to a Soviet surprise attack. Initially, the threat came from the Soviet long-range air force, and later from Soviet intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs). The detonation of the Soviet H-bomb in the summer of 1953 and signs the following year that Moscow might have a larger and more sophisticated strategic bomber program than previously suspected, gave rise to a variety of increased requirements. Based on limited evidence, the Air Force projected a Soviet advantage of up to two-to-one in long-range bombers by the end of the decade. The other Services and the CIA suspected that the Air Force was playing fast and loose with its numbers to pad its budget requests. The give-and-take continued into 1956 when, with the help of U-2 photographs, it became clear that the "bomber gap" grossly exaggerated Soviet capabilities and the matter was laid to rest, but not before the Air Force had acquired additional funding to augment its bomber fleet.<sup>42</sup> At the same time, to reduce SAC's vulnerability to bomber attack, the Eisenhower administration resorted to a series of costly countermeasures, including dispersed basing of SAC's planes, the deployment of an integrated system of missiles and air defense interceptors, extension of the distant early warning (DEW) line, and the creation in 1958 of a combined U.S.-Canadian command and control organization known as the North American Air Defense Command (NORAD). Nonetheless, SAC's vulnerability persisted and gave rise to ever-increasing requirements to allow it to "ride out" an enemy attack, a process that kept alive and aggravated tensions within the Joint Chiefs over the allocation of resources.<sup>43</sup>

The Navy, defying all predictions, adjusted remarkably well to the New Look. While Navy leaders made no secret of their disdain for the pro-Air Force orientation of Eisenhower's defense program, there was no repetition of the nasty sniping after World War II and no second "revolt" of the admirals. Radford's presence as Chairman eased the situation considerably, as did the leeway the Navy received to conduct both a high-profile missile R&D effort, which eventually gave rise to the Polaris fleet ballistic missile system, and a shipbuilding program that included construction of a new generation of heavy carriers. Dating from the Korean War, the carrier program was the brainchild of Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Forrest P. Sherman and initially envisioned replacing the Navy's World War II *Essex*-class carriers with larger *Forrestal*-class ships at a rate of one a year for 10 years. While the pace slowed during the 1950s, the eventual goal remained the same. By the end of the Eisenhower years, the Navy had commissioned four new *Forrestal*-class carriers and had a fifth (the nuclear-powered *Enterprise*) nearing completion. Out of 26 carriers then in service, 15 were large attack carriers (*Essex*-class or bigger), a number that remained nearly constant for the duration of the Cold War.<sup>44</sup>

The size and design of the *Forrestal*-class “super carriers” meant they could embark nuclear-capable aircraft. To avoid renewed accusations of competition with the Air Force, the Navy assigned them a general purpose role. Sherman envisioned these ships serving primarily in the Atlantic or Mediterranean, delivering conventional and atomic attacks against Soviet naval bases and airfields in support of NATO.<sup>45</sup> But because of continuing tensions in the Far East and better port facilities in the Pacific, Admiral Carney persuaded President Eisenhower to modify this strategy. Thus, the carriers came to be concentrated in the Pacific, with the proviso that in a European emergency the Navy would redeploy them as needed to assist NATO. Navy planners were never comfortable with this “swing strategy,” and in 1955 Carney’s successor, Admiral Arleigh A. Burke, launched a campaign to abolish it. Once in place, however, the swing strategy became a firm fixture of NATO force planning. A symbol of the American commitment, it survived to the dying days of the Cold War, despite one effort after another by the Joint Chiefs to eliminate it.<sup>46</sup>

The JCS member least enamored with the New Look was General Matthew B. Ridgway, who openly disparaged many aspects of the President’s defense policy throughout his 2-year term as Army Chief of Staff. Ridgway’s main objections to the New Look were that it failed to preserve an adequate mobilization base for rapid Army expansion in an emergency and that it gave undue emphasis to nuclear weapons without fully vetting the concept.<sup>47</sup> His successor, General Maxwell D. Taylor, was, if anything, even more censorious of administration policy. Ridgway knew that the New Look would take a heavy toll on the Army, but he professed to be shocked by the full impact, which involved reducing Army personnel strength by more than 500,000 and slimming down from 20 to 14 Active-duty divisions by 1957.<sup>48</sup> As an economy measure, Eisenhower also wanted the Army to redeploy as many units as possible from NATO and other overseas theaters to the United States, but shelved his plans in the face of strong political and diplomatic objections. As a result, force levels in Europe remained essentially unchanged, while the two divisions left in Korea after the armistice, the one in Hawaii, and those stateside in the Strategic Reserve routinely operated at reduced strength.<sup>49</sup>

Looking ahead, Eisenhower challenged the Army to reconfigure itself around smaller, more mobile divisions designed specifically for the nuclear battlefield. Eisenhower believed that, with the advent of nuclear weapons, no infantry division needed to be bigger than 12,000 men.<sup>50</sup> Studies done at the U.S. Army Infantry School and exercises conducted by the Army Field Forces (later, the Continental Army Command) indicated, however, that combat in a nuclear environment would require divisions to be larger rather than smaller. Efforts to address this problem led in 1956 to the adoption of the “pentomic” division as the blueprint for the Army

of the future. Organized into five battle groups, pentomic divisions resembled the structure of the airborne divisions that Ridgway and Taylor commanded in World War II. Each pentomic division had approximately 11,500 men rather than the 17,000 in a post-Korean War “triangular” infantry division. Rated as “dual capable,” a pentomic division incorporated conventional firepower and an array of nuclear weapons, from atomic artillery to nuclear-tipped rockets and missiles, and—most unique of all—the “Davy Crockett,” a spigot mortar (often erroneously described as a recoilless rifle) adapted to fire a sub-kiloton nuclear warhead. Further study and field tests soon demonstrated that pentomic divisions would lack staying power in a conflict and that much of the hardware and weaponry on which these units depended was not up to the job. By 1960, Army leaders were exploring yet another divisional reorganization scheme.<sup>51</sup>

Even though the pentomic division failed to measure up and soon disappeared, it served a useful purpose by drawing the Army’s attention to the impact of new technologies. What the New Look taught Army leaders as much as anything was that, if they were to protect their budget share and remain competitive with the Air Force and the Navy, they had to move beyond an “unglamorous” arsenal of tanks, artillery, and small arms and devote more research and development to guided missiles and other sophisticated weapons. To avoid becoming marginalized, the Army needed to broaden its mission. Taking this lesson to heart as the 1950s progressed, Army leaders used their small but aggressive R&D program to solidify their claim to old functions and lay claim to new ones.<sup>52</sup> In some ways, the Army succeeded too well, for in the process Service roles and missions were again left in disarray. By 1957, the Army was the first Service to test a land-based intermediate-range ballistic missile (IRBM), known as JUPITER, forging ahead of the Air Force’s THOR program, and was on the verge of seizing control of the anti-intercontinental ballistic missile (ABM) function with its planned NIKE-ZEUS interceptor missile. This last development was a critical step toward the Army acquiring a major role in strategic warfare and would have reverberations that would echo to the end of the Cold War and beyond.

### TESTING THE NEW LOOK: INDOCHINA

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While the Joint Chiefs were still digesting the impact of the New Look, events abroad were testing its basic premise that nuclear weapons held the key to the country’s future security. No sooner had the dust begun to settle in Korea than the Cold War shifted to Indochina, where the protracted struggle between the French and the Communist Viet Minh appeared to be entering a new and decisive phase. Even

though the French had yet to suffer a major setback, war-weariness at home and the inability of French Union troops (predominantly Vietnamese) to sustain the initiative suggested a shift in momentum in favor of the Viet Minh.<sup>53</sup> Finding the war was no longer winnable, the French government notified Washington in July 1953 that it would follow the example of the United States in Korea and end the Indochina conflict as soon as possible, preferably through a negotiated settlement. Expecting the worst, U.S. intelligence sources warned that a Viet Minh victory in Indochina “would remove a significant military barrier” and open the way for communism to “sweep” across Southeast Asia into the Indian subcontinent and beyond.<sup>54</sup>

The Eisenhower administration’s initial response was to continue its predecessor’s practice of bolstering indigenous forces in Indochina and elsewhere with advice and assistance. Policies adopted in 1953–1954 by the National Security Council, however, indicated a strong willingness to fight to protect U.S. interests in the Western Pacific and to curb the further expansion of Chinese Communist power and influence. JCS contingency planning based on these policies assumed the use of nuclear weapons.<sup>55</sup> But at a five-power staff planners conference hosted by CINCPAC at Pearl Harbor in September–October 1953, the British, French, Australian, and New Zealand military representatives balked at giving prior approval to any military action involving “weapons of mass destruction.” A none-too-subtle expression of worry over radioactive contamination from recent atomic weapons tests, the allies’ objections also appeared to reflect their growing concern for the potentially adverse impact on Asian opinion that the use of nuclear weapons in that part of the world could have. Even so, the Joint Chiefs reminded CINCPAC after the conference that the exclusion of nuclear weapons, even for planning purposes, was contrary to approved U.S. policy, and directed the Strategic Air Command to develop an atomic attack plan against selected targets in China and Manchuria should Communist Chinese forces intervene in Indochina. Yet, given the reluctance of the other powers in the region to associate themselves with U.S. retaliatory plans, it was likely that in an extreme emergency the United States could find itself acting unilaterally.<sup>56</sup>

While the possible use of nuclear weapons was ever-present throughout the crisis, the larger and more immediate issue facing the Joint Chiefs was whether to get involved at all.<sup>57</sup> Forced to accept sizable budget and troop reductions and having only recently concluded the conflict in Korea, the Service chiefs—Ridgway especially—were uneasy about being drawn into another Asian war. Keeping his options open, President Eisenhower never categorically ruled out direct intervention. But he shared his military advisors’ concerns about the costs and consequences, and assured them that he could not imagine putting U.S. ground forces anywhere in Southeast Asia “except possibly in Malaya,” where the British and Australians were



## COUNCIL OF WAR

involved in suppressing a Communist insurgency. Playing down the possibility of U.S. intervention, he likened the American role to fixing “a leaky dike,” and in January 1954 he approved policy guidelines limiting retaliation in Indochina to air and/or naval power should the French falter or the Chinese intervene.<sup>58</sup>

Even though the President had seemed to rule out the use of ground troops, events in Indochina conspired to keep the issue alive, and over the next several months Joint Staff and Army planners continued to pay it close attention. The immediate concern was the gathering crisis over Dien Bien Phu, a French redoubt on the Laotian frontier, which had come under siege. By the beginning of 1954, the Viet Minh had the French completely surrounded and wholly dependent on air-delivered reinforcements and supplies. In developing U.S. responses to the ensuing crisis, Eisenhower often bypassed the Service chiefs, finding it more expedient to deal directly with Admiral Radford. Familiar with the Far East, Radford tended to be more open-minded than his JCS colleagues in addressing French requests for assistance and more flexible on the issue of American military intervention, so much so that Indochina was sometimes seen as “Radford’s war.”

Confirmation that the Chairman was now part of Eisenhower’s “inner circle” came from his appointment to the President’s Special Committee on Indochina, created in January 1954 to develop a program for aiding the French without overt U.S. participation. The others on the panel were Director of Central Intelligence Allen Dulles, Undersecretary of State Walter Bedell Smith, Deputy Secretary of Defense Roger M. Kyes, and C.D. Jackson, the President’s special advisor on psychological warfare. As the composition of the committee suggests, Eisenhower hoped to avoid direct American military involvement in Indochina through the alternative of covert operations, an increasingly common Cold War practice that in this instance had the strong encouragement and endorsement of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.<sup>59</sup> But as the Viet Minh tightened their siege of Dien Bien Phu, doubts grew whether covert operations as planned would be sufficient, causing the Special Committee to speculate that “direct military action” might be required to safeguard U.S. interests.<sup>60</sup>

Toward the end of March 1954, General Paul Ely, chief of the French Armed Forces staff, arrived in Washington appealing for help to stave off a collapse at Dien Bien Phu. Ely estimated the chances of avoiding defeat at fifty-fifty. Convinced that the situation was dire, Radford advised the President that the United States needed “to be prepared to act promptly and in force” to relieve the pressure on Dien Bien Phu.<sup>61</sup> According to Ely’s recollections, Eisenhower instructed Radford (in Ely’s presence) to make priority responses to all French requests to assist Dien Bien Phu.<sup>62</sup> Ely returned to Paris confident that the United States would provide land- and sea-based air support for a pending operation (code-named *Vulture*) to lift



the siege. He apparently believed the United States would employ nuclear weapons. By now, the Joint Staff had several attack plans under consideration—one involving the use of conventional munitions dropped by B-29s, and another plan, derived from Army G-3 staff studies, that envisioned the use of up to six tactical nuclear weapons delivered by Air Force or Navy fighter-bombers. But at a meeting of the Joint Chiefs on March 31, Radford encountered uniformly strong opposition led by Ridgway. Even Twining, who normally backed up Radford in JCS debates, would give only guarded support to the operation, leaving the Chairman isolated as the only JCS member fully favoring armed U.S. involvement.<sup>63</sup>

This meeting was, for all practical purposes, the high-water mark of planning for intervention and for the possible use of nuclear weapons in Indochina. Though Radford continued to promote the project, his better judgment told him it was a lost cause. Unable to carry his JCS colleagues with him, his arguments rang hollow. Indeed, as word “leaked” that the Joint Chiefs were at odds over a plan of action, support for intervention among congressional leaders and within the international community collapsed almost overnight. The French continued to assume that American help was on the way. But as the days passed and no American relief materialized, Dien Bien Phu’s fate became certain. On May 7, 1954, after heavy fighting, the garrison capitulated. Later that summer at Geneva, the major powers concluded an agreement ending French rule in Indochina and dividing Vietnam, like Korea and Germany, into Communist and non-Communist states.

Had the Joint Chiefs supported intervention, the course of events assuredly would have been different. But with the long and indecisive involvement in the Korean War a vivid memory and postwar budget cuts eroding force levels, the Service chiefs were averse to embarking on what Ridgway termed “a dangerous strategic diversion of limited United States military capabilities.”<sup>64</sup> To them, as to the American public, the use of nuclear weapons, even for limited tactical purposes, still implied a major conflict transcending traditional norms. Administration policy and preferences notwithstanding, the JCS, excluding Admiral Radford, remained uncomfortable with the notion that nuclear weapons were simply another part of the arsenal. Looking back on the crisis, Eisenhower found it “frustrating” that he had not achieved more success in educating the public, his military advisors, or the international community “on the weapons that might have to be used” in future wars.<sup>65</sup>

## CONFRONTATION IN THE TAIWAN STRAIT

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As the Indochina crisis neared an end, the next test of the New Look was already in the making over a looming confrontation in the Taiwan Strait. At issue was the fate

## COUNCIL OF WAR

of three small island groups (Tachen, Matsu, and Quemoy) lying a few miles off the China mainland, which the Nationalists had occupied since 1949. The Nationalists used these islands for intelligence gathering, early-warning radar bases, and jumping-off points for commando raids against Communist positions on the mainland. Most U.S. military analysts agreed that the strategic value of these islands was negligible. But after the stalemate in Korea and the French collapse in Indochina, Admiral Radford insisted that the United States could not afford to give up more ground. Indeed, he saw their loss as having “far reaching implications” of a political, psychological, and military nature that could undermine resistance to Communism on Taiwan and throughout the Far East. With air and naval superiority in the area, the Chairman argued, the United States enjoyed distinct advantages that it had not had during the Indochina crisis.<sup>66</sup> Weighing the pros and cons of defending the islands, Eisenhower, though skeptical whether they were of much value militarily, gradually came around to Radford’s point of view that their political importance was overriding.<sup>67</sup>

The situation turned critical on September 3, 1954, when the Communist Chinese launched a heavy artillery bombardment of Quemoy. As the confrontation was taking shape, Eisenhower seemed more prepared than ever to entertain a nuclear response and speculated at one point that the People’s Republic of China’s fleet of junks would make “a good target for an atomic bomb” if the Communists tried to invade Taiwan.<sup>68</sup> Throughout the crisis, he and Radford remained convinced that the use of nuclear weapons in such situations was only a matter of time and that the United States needed to accept the idea in order to be better equipped and ready. But despite tough talk, the administration initially leaned toward a guarded response, and for the first few months of the crisis the United States fell back on more traditional means of applying pressure—the signing of a formal defense treaty with Taiwan in December 1954, obtaining declarations of support for Taiwan from Congress, and a buildup of conventional U.S. air and naval forces in the Taiwan Strait.

The administration’s caution and restraint reflected, among other things, the continuing “split” among the Joint Chiefs over the New Look’s practical application, reinforced by an underlying worry (common to military and civilian policy-planners alike) that the use of nuclear weapons in Asia could provoke an anti-American backlash and charges of racism. Such thinking may have influenced deliberations during the Indochina crisis, but it was not until the Taiwan Strait episode—when the use of nuclear weapons would undoubtedly have resulted in thousands of Chinese casualties—that the full impact became apparent. Still, it did not stop either Eisenhower or Radford from seriously considering the nuclear option.<sup>69</sup> Having failed to rally JCS support during the Indochina episode, Radford made a determined effort from the outset of the Taiwan Strait crisis to develop a consensus within

the JCS that the offshore islands should be defended, leaving aside the question of the means for the time being. A majority of the chiefs, including Twining, Carney, and Shepherd, agreed that the United States had valid security interests at stake and should be prepared to act in their defense. But they refused to hand Radford a blank check and insisted that “available forces,” with minor augmentation, could do the job. To Ridgway, however, even a token involvement seemed excessive. Insisting that the offshore islands were of “minuscule importance,” he viewed a decision to defend them as folly. If, however, the administration went ahead, it should realize the risks involved and be ready to take “emergency actions to strengthen the entire national military establishment and to prepare for war.”<sup>70</sup>

Also weighing into the debate was Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, Eisenhower’s most trusted advisor. One of the original architects of the New Look, Dulles was well known for his “hawkish” views on combating communism and as author of the “brinkmanship” concept linking proactive diplomacy to the threatened large-scale use of nuclear weapons. But by the fall of 1954, Dulles was having second thoughts and had come to the conclusion that the use of nuclear weapons short of all-out war would lack popular support at home, alienate U.S. allies in Europe, and hand the Communist Chinese a propaganda issue they could exploit for years to come. The United States, he warned, “would be in this fight in Asia completely alone.” Though he supported defending Taiwan, Dulles questioned the strategic value of the offshore islands and persuaded Eisenhower to avoid provocative actions that might turn world opinion against the United States or make it exceedingly difficult to use nuclear weapons later when they might make a difference.<sup>71</sup>

Tensions in the Taiwan Strait, meanwhile, continued to escalate. In January 1955, the Communists began ratcheting up the pressure, first against Tachen, which the Nationalists at U.S. urging evacuated in early February, and then opposite Quemoy and Matsu, where the People’s Republic of China (PRC) appeared to be massing troops for an invasion. By March, believing a showdown to be imminent, Radford was laying the groundwork for a nuclear response. “Our whole military structure had been built around this assumption,” he told the NSC. “We simply do not have the requisite number of air bases to permit effective air attack against Communist China, using conventional as opposed to atomic weapons.” Likely targets identified by the Joint Staff and CINCPAC included Communist Chinese airfields adjacent to Quemoy and Matsu and petroleum storage facilities as far away as Shanghai and Guangzhou (Canton). To minimize collateral damage, Radford insisted that only “precision atomic weapons” would be used.<sup>72</sup>

By then, Radford had a majority of the Service chiefs behind him in support of some form of military action, with Ridgway the lone dissenting voice.<sup>73</sup> Believing

## COUNCIL OF WAR

that talk of war had gotten out of hand, Eisenhower rejected the JCS majority view favoring “*full-out* defense of Quemoy and Matsu,” and sought instead a cooling off period, as much to reassure nervous allies in Europe as to head off a confrontation with China.<sup>74</sup> He seemed to feel, given the uncertainty of the situation, that the use of atomic weapons was becoming more and more a course of last resort.<sup>75</sup> In late April, he sent Admiral Radford and Assistant Secretary of State Walter S. Robertson (both of whom knew Chiang Kai-shek personally) to Taipei to explain the situation.<sup>76</sup> The Communist Chinese also appeared to be having second thoughts, and at the Bandung conference on April 23, Premier Zhou Enlai declared the PRC’s readiness to discuss “relaxing tensions” in the Far East, “especially in the Taiwan area.”<sup>77</sup>

By the end of May 1955, an informal ceasefire had settled over the offshore islands, causing the issue to drop off the JCS agenda. A revival of tensions in 1958 produced a second offshore islands crisis, replete with renewed bombardment of Quemoy and Matsu, a buildup of forces by both sides, and invasion threats from the PRC. Once again, the Joint Chiefs considered a possible nuclear response but held a decision in abeyance pending a clearer picture of the situation. The crisis ended, like the first, inconclusively and was the last time the Eisenhower administration contemplated the use of tactical nuclear weapons against the People’s Republic of China.<sup>78</sup> Only on two further occasions—during the 1961 Laotian crisis and the 1968 siege of Khe Sanh during the Vietnam War—did the JCS again actively consider recourse to nuclear weapons in Asia. In both instances, the advantages to be gained seemed incompatible with the risk.<sup>79</sup> Seizing on the many advances in nuclear technology in the decade following World War II, the New Look gave the Joint Chiefs access to unprecedented power and a wealth of innovative tools for waging war. But it did not do much to clarify how or in what circumstances they might be applied.

## THE “NEW APPROACH” IN EUROPE

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Doubts and uncertainty among the JCS notwithstanding, the Eisenhower administration remained firmly committed to developing a military posture that stressed nuclear weapons. Nowhere was this commitment more strongly pursued than in Europe where the New Look took the form of the “New Approach,” adopted by the North Atlantic Council in December 1954 as MC 48, the new basic blueprint for NATO strategy. While MC 48 affirmed the continuing need for conventional forces, it cited superiority in atomic weapons and the capacity to deliver them as “the most important factor in a major war in the foreseeable future.” At the time,

NATO had a mere handful of atomic weapons at its disposal; within a decade, largely as a result of steps taken by the Eisenhower administration, it would have a dedicated arsenal of 7,000 nuclear bombs and warheads.<sup>80</sup>

NATO's embrace of a nuclear response to Soviet aggression in Europe stood in marked contrast to the Allies' opposition to the Eisenhower administration's threatened use of such weapons in Asia. The explanation for this paradox lies in NATO's underlying philosophy of deterrence and defense, and the historic role nuclear weapons had played in NATO strategy. For the European Allies, actually using nuclear weapons and threatening their use were two wholly different matters. Nuclear weapons had been a fundamental part of NATO's politico-military culture since the Alliance's inception in 1949 and had grown steadily in importance. As Stanley R. Sloan and others have shown, not only were nuclear weapons essential for military purposes as NATO's primary deterrent and first line of defense; they were a key ingredient in the political bond holding the Atlantic Alliance together. The U.S. commitment to come to Europe's protection in the event of a Soviet invasion, exposing itself to nuclear retaliation on Europe's behalf, was central to what the American diplomat Harlan Cleveland called the "transatlantic bargain," a community of reinforcing interests. American nuclear weapons, in effect, sealed the deal.<sup>81</sup>

Nonetheless, prior to the Eisenhower administration, the JCS had tried to play down NATO's dependence on nuclear weapons, partly because they remained few in number and out of concern that increased reliance might discourage European conventional rearmament. With the impending advent of nuclear plenty, however, views began to change. The first to acknowledge the opportunities were the British Chiefs of Staff, whose 1952 "white paper" on global strategy offered an alternative course linked directly to the utility of a growing arsenal of nuclear weapons in lieu of conventional capabilities.<sup>82</sup> As British defense planners described it, the aim would be "to increase the effectiveness of existing [NATO] forces rather than to raise additional forces."<sup>83</sup>

With the exception of the Air Force, the military Services in the United States paid little attention to these proposals, believing it premature to write off conventional rearmament efforts. But by the summer of 1953, a combination of factors—the ongoing review of U.S. defense policy that included discussions of withdrawing U.S. troops from Europe, planned cutbacks in U.S. military aid, a slumping European economy, and an embryonic initiative by the British to place their own version of the New Look before NATO—put pressure on the JCS to reexamine their position and to come up with fresh ideas on how to satisfy European security needs. The chiefs agreed that because of the European Allies' economic difficulties, there was little likelihood of NATO meeting declared force goals on time and that a

reexamination of NATO strategy would certainly be in order. But there was no unanimity on what the United States ought to suggest.<sup>84</sup> Earlier, as SACEUR, General Ridgway had requested five battalions of the new 280-mm cannon, which could fire either conventional or atomic shells, and had initiated studies on using tactical nuclear weapons to bolster NATO's forward defense strategy and to offset reductions in troop strength. However, the results of these inquiries, based on sketchy data and limited familiarity with nuclear weapons, had disappointed those seeking a relatively cheap and convenient replacement for expensive conventional forces. Now, as Army Chief of Staff, Ridgway shied away from the further nuclearization of NATO and enlisted Admiral Carney in support of keeping the status quo until completion of the U.S. military review then underway. General Twining, the Air Force member, was the only Service chief who ventured to speculate that the solution to NATO's problems might require a sharp departure from current policy and doctrine.<sup>85</sup>

Unable to elicit unanimous advice from the Joint Chiefs, President Eisenhower gave Secretary of State Dulles a free hand to come up with a plan of action. Moving quickly to avoid being preempted by the British, Dulles achieved high-level interagency agreement by late September 1953 on a "new concept" to expand NATO's application of tactical nuclear weapons. At Admiral Radford's request, the State Department postponed a final decision until the JCS had a chance to review the plan.<sup>86</sup> But the chiefs' response, when it came on October 22, skirted the issue by suggesting that the matter be held over for review by the NATO Standing Group, where a final recommendation might have been held up indefinitely.<sup>87</sup> Ignoring the chiefs' proposal, Dulles sounded out his British and French counterparts at the Bermuda conference in December 1953. He then put the issue before the North Atlantic Council, which adopted a resolution instructing NATO's top commanders to review their strategy and force structure, taking account of recent breakthroughs in military technology.<sup>88</sup>

As a result of these actions, the initiative shifted from the JCS in Washington to NATO planners in Paris working under the direction of General Alfred M. Gruenther, USA, Ridgway's successor as SACEUR, and his air deputy, General Lauris Norstad, USAF. Gruenther, a former Director of the Joint Staff, was also one of Eisenhower's closest personal friends. Using fresh intelligence and doctrinal and tactical assumptions in line with the known effects of nuclear weapons, Gruenther and his staff recast the studies Ridgway had done.<sup>89</sup> It was from these "New Approach" studies that MC 48, a 3-year plan for reorganizing NATO's forces, emerged. The key finding was that while the level of M-day forces would remain essentially unchanged, the substitution of nuclear weapons for conventional firepower would cause requirements for follow-on reserve forces to go down.<sup>90</sup> Midway through the

NATO review, in August 1954, the French Assembly voted to defer action on the European Defence Community (EDC), effectively killing the project and throwing the whole question of German rearmament into confusion. Gruenther had always said that, even with an enhanced nuclear capability, NATO would still need a credible conventional “shield” to prevent Western Europe from being overrun. For this reason, he remained a staunch proponent of a full German contribution to NATO and a strong conventional component. But with the EDC a shambles, NATO’s credibility now rested more than ever on sharpening its nuclear “sword.”<sup>91</sup>

While the Joint Chiefs endorsed the New Approach, two members—Ridgway and Carney—did so with reservations, warning that the collateral damage from nuclear weapons to cities and civilians would be almost catastrophic. They embraced the New Approach and, in the Army’s case, the pentomic divisions and other paraphernalia that went along with it, not because they thought these changes would improve European security or save money, but because they were convinced that nuclear weapons would inevitably be used in a major conflict. Plausible deterrence, in the JCS view, therefore dictated that NATO had to be prepared to fight both a conventional and a nuclear war.<sup>92</sup> At the time, deterrence theory rested largely on balancing the raw military power of one side against that of another. Intelligence confirmed that the Soviets continued to devote high priority to their atomic energy program, and following Stalin’s demise, there were mounting indications that, like the Eisenhower administration, the Soviet Union’s new leaders were shifting the burden of defense from conventional forces to nuclear weapons to cut costs.<sup>93</sup>

The Joint Chiefs expected to be busy for years sorting out how the New Approach should be interpreted and applied. Though convincing the NAC to accept the idea came more easily than expected, there remained a distinct anxiety among the Europeans over who would have the authority to order the use of tactical nuclear weapons if deterrence failed. Since the United States was the only NATO power at the time with a significant nuclear capability (British forces began receiving production nuclear bombs late in 1954), the fate of Western Europe could well rest in U.S. hands. The solution favored by the Joint Chiefs was to give NATO’s supreme commanders preexisting approval to carry out agreed defense plans in full.<sup>94</sup> Recognizing the need for greater flexibility but unwilling to go quite so far, the Eisenhower administration in December 1953 liberalized its policy on sharing atomic energy information with other countries where legally permissible.<sup>95</sup> A new Atomic Energy Act, which cleared Congress in the summer of 1954, paved the way for closer collaboration.<sup>96</sup>

The Joint Chiefs allocated nuclear weapons as needed to satisfy NATO requirements and stockpiled them at various locations in Western Europe under the



custody and control of the American theater commander (USCINCEUR), also serving as SACEUR.<sup>97</sup> This arrangement allowed Europeans access to U.S. weapons for planning purposes and ostensibly a voice in deciding how and where these weapons would come into play during a conflict. But it did not go far enough to suit some, and by the end of the decade there was growing talk on both sides of the Atlantic of creating a “NATO common stockpile.” Proponents contended that the Alliance should have the capacity to operate independently with its own nuclear assets, including not only tactical weapons but also land- and/or sea-based IRBMs that could threaten strategic targets in the Soviet Union.<sup>98</sup> The Joint Chiefs opposed such a move since it would unhinge U.S. war plans from NATO’s and duplicate some targeting. But as the Eisenhower administration drew to a close, the momentum within the Alliance was moving toward creation of a NATO-led multilateral nuclear force.<sup>99</sup>

### NATO’S CONVENTIONAL POSTURE

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Despite the increased emphasis on nuclear deterrence, most of the weapons NATO needed for its new strategy did not reach Europe in appreciable numbers until the late 1950s and early 1960s. Until then, conventional “shield” forces remained the core of NATO’s defense posture. Over the course of the decade, the limited introduction of improved tanks, armored personnel carriers, and heavy, self-propelled artillery gradually transformed NATO from a largely foot infantry force into a modern, combined-arms force.<sup>100</sup> Overall, however, these qualitative improvements were insufficient to provide a credible conventional alternative. Nor did they prevent NATO’s capabilities from eroding as assets previously allocated for a conventional role (e.g., tactical aircraft) were reconfigured for nuclear missions and as Alliance members unilaterally reduced their contributions in the expectation that nuclear weapons would fill the gaps. The largest and most significant reductions were by the French, whose growing concern over the insurgency in Algeria from 1954 on prompted the eventual transfer of five divisions from NATO to North Africa. By the end of the decade, France had 500,000 troops tied down in Algeria and the equivalent of only one division dedicated to NATO, instead of the 15 to 20 once envisioned.<sup>101</sup>

Other members failed to pick up the slack. As long-time proponents of German rearmament, the JCS expected the admission of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) to NATO in 1955 to go far toward solving manpower problems. However, they were taken aback when, a year later, the FRG decided to slow its rearmament program by shortening the length of service for draftees and to seek



access to nuclear weapons. The planned structure of the *Bundeswehr* remained 12 divisions and 40 air squadrons, but manpower would be cut by roughly one-third and the target date for completion of the buildup would be moved from 1961 to 1965.<sup>102</sup> Around the same time, bowing to fiscal constraints, Britain, Belgium, and the Netherlands also began to prune their conventional contributions to NATO.<sup>103</sup> In May 1957, the NAC adopted a new formal strategy statement (MC 14/2) confirming that tactical nuclear weapons would be NATO's mainstay against a Soviet invasion, and tentatively set new conventional force goals (formally approved in 1958 as MC 70) of 30 ready divisions in the Central Region for lesser contingencies. But with only about 19 divisions on hand, NATO was still well below its goal.<sup>104</sup>

Even the United States, by far the strongest member of the Alliance, had trouble meeting its commitments. Though U.S. deployments held steady at around six division-equivalents, Army units were often under strength and unevenly equipped. Only the Air Force maintained a level of preparedness consistent with agreed force goals.<sup>105</sup> Uneasy over NATO's prospects, the JCS continued to incorporate provisions in U.S. war plans (as distinct from NATO plans) for a withdrawal of American forces to defensive positions along the Alps and the Pyrenees should the Rhine-Ijssel line be breached.<sup>106</sup> Among Europeans, speculation was rife that the Eisenhower administration had secret plans to reduce its commitment to NATO and that it intended to rely more than ever on Reserve units based in the United States and swing forces in the Pacific to meet its obligations.

Matters came to a head in the summer of 1956 when, in a money-saving move, Admiral Radford attempted to persuade the JCS to accept a radical restructuring of the Armed Forces that included reducing U.S. troops in Europe by 50,000 and reorganizing American ground units into small atomic-armed task forces. The Service chiefs acknowledged the need to reduce overseas deployments, but they could see no place in either the Far East or Europe where this could be done without enormous risks.<sup>107</sup> Secretary of State Dulles and Secretary of Defense Charles E. Wilson backed the plan, and in October 1956 President Eisenhower added his concurrence. However, unauthorized "leaks" making it appear that the United States was preparing to abandon NATO soon followed, provoking an international incident. Embarrassed and chagrined, the administration hastily backtracked, and most of the proposed reductions were restored during the final mark-up of the defense budget at the end of the year, keeping U.S. forces in Europe more or less intact.<sup>108</sup>

Fortunately for NATO, Soviet bloc forces around this time were no better prepared than those in the West, and in certain categories they were probably weaker. Neither side appeared to possess decisive conventional power. Estimates of Soviet capabilities originated within the Services' intelligence offices and focused

on counting units and equipment. Owing to a lack of reliable data, these estimates tended to be on the high side and paid little attention to manning levels or the quality, training, and readiness of enemy forces. Studies done in the West routinely depicted the Soviets overrunning NATO even with the Allies using nuclear weapons.<sup>109</sup> The benchmark figure of 175 Soviet divisions remained intact and did not come under close scrutiny until the end of the decade, when the CIA found Soviet divisions to be at various levels of preparedness. Most of those opposite NATO in East Germany proved to be fully ready front-line units. However, only about a third of the Soviet divisions fell into this category, and the rest were either under-strength reserve units or cadres.<sup>110</sup> The creation in 1955 of the Warsaw Pact, an alliance dominated by Moscow, increased the scope of Soviet strategic control in East Europe but probably added little to the Kremlin's immediate capabilities. Political instability within the satellite countries, highlighted by the 1953 East German uprising and the 1956 Hungarian rebellion, cast doubt on the reliability of non-Soviet Warsaw Pact forces.<sup>111</sup>

In sum, NATO planning during the Eisenhower years yielded mixed results. Shaped by essentially the same philosophy and budgetary pressures that were driving defense policy in the United States, the New Approach promised a powerful deterrent against all-out Soviet aggression and a convenient way for NATO's members to save money on defense, but it limited their ability to cope with lesser contingencies. While it did not do away with conventional forces, the New Approach definitely downplayed their role. Missing from this strategy was any provision for a "nuclear pause" or "firebreak" during a crisis to avoid rapid escalation. It was largely for these reasons—the threat of unforeseen consequences and the absence of flexibility—that the Joint Chiefs split over whether a nuclear-oriented strategy significantly improved NATO's defense posture and European security. Radford did his best to promote the President's cause, but he repeatedly ran into strong resistance from the Army and Navy. Though both Services eventually signed off on the New Approach, they did so reluctantly, sensing that they had no choice, and because they knew they would not get the larger conventional forces they wanted.

## CURBING THE ARMS RACE

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With nuclear weapons in the forefront of American defense policy during the 1950s, the size, composition, and readiness of the U.S. nuclear stockpile became a matter of utmost JCS concern. The Joint Chiefs had conducted a detailed annual review since 1947 to make sure the stockpile was satisfying military requirements. Bowing to JCS requests, the Truman administration in 1949, 1950, and 1952 approved three

separate increases in the production capacity for fissionable materials. According to historian David Alan Rosenberg, these decisions recast the country's defense posture by launching the United States into an era of "nuclear plenty" and by generating a construction program capable of providing U.S. forces with nuclear weapons for the duration of the Cold War and beyond.<sup>112</sup> Without the production increases initiated during the Truman years, the New Look would never have been conceivable. From a base of around 1,100 weapons when the Eisenhower administration took office, the nuclear stockpile grew to about 22,000 by the time the President stepped down. Though the Soviets kept the details of their atomic energy program a closely guarded secret, retrospective estimates compiled in the West suggest that their nuclear stockpile increased from a handful of weapons in 1950 to between 1,700 and 4,500 ten years later.<sup>113</sup>

Ironically, this rapid and sustained growth in nuclear weapons production came at a time when the United States and the Soviet Union were taking the first serious steps in nearly a decade to find common ground for resuming arms control and disarmament negotiations. While the JCS had no objection to arms control per se, they were constantly on guard against ill-considered and unenforceable schemes that could compromise national security. With memories of the ill-fated Baruch Plan as a constant reminder, they resisted renewed calls for international control of atomic energy and turned a cold eye on measures that might stifle the development of the nuclear stockpile, like India's 1954 call for a moratorium on atmospheric nuclear testing. Popular and international pressure to curb the "arms race," however, kept the arms control and disarmament issue very much alive and compelled the Joint Chiefs to revisit it more often than they would have preferred.<sup>114</sup>

Eisenhower and the JCS agreed that a significant improvement in the international situation and concrete demonstrations of Soviet goodwill should precede major reductions in either conventional or nuclear arms. Convinced that the Sino-Soviet bloc's vast reservoir of manpower gave it a distinct advantage in a conflict, they believed that the West's most effective counter was its lead in technology—most of all, its superiority in nuclear weapons. The ability of the Soviet Union to duplicate American achievements, including most recently the H-bomb, and to develop delivery systems comparable to those in the U.S. inventory, may have diluted the West's advantage, but it did not, in Eisenhower's or the chiefs' view, negate or lessen the fundamental importance of nuclear weapons to national security. Nuclear weapons, the JCS argued, gave the United States an "indeterminate advantage" over the Soviet Union and its allies that should be nourished and preserved at all costs.<sup>115</sup>

When the Eisenhower administration took office in 1953, ongoing multinational disarmament negotiations before the United Nations still concentrated on

sweeping proposals to eliminate conventional and nuclear weapons. While President Eisenhower professed a strong personal interest in arms limitation, the absence of reliable verification measures and the administration's decision to structure the country's defense posture around nuclear weapons raised serious questions of whether the United States should continue to participate in these kinds of negotiations. Lengthy NSC discussions of this issue yielded the affirmation in August 1954 that, from a public relations standpoint, the United States had no choice and needed to be seen as still favoring "a practical arrangement for the limitation of armaments with the USSR."<sup>116</sup> Still, the consensus within the administration was that the time for such agreements had passed and that a more sensible alternative was to pursue limited objectives. While the Joint Chiefs offered no specific opinion during the administration's internal debate, this approach seems to have accorded more closely with their preferences than any other.<sup>117</sup>

Indicative of the administration's shift in focus was the increasing use of "arms control" rather than "disarmament" to describe the goals of American policy. The initial test of the limited-objectives strategy was President Eisenhower's "Atoms for Peace" speech to the United Nations in December 1953. Sidestepping the stalled disarmament debate, the President stressed the peaceful potential of nuclear power and the need to "hasten the day when fear of the atom will begin to disappear." To coordinate peaceful applications, he proposed the creation of an International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), a watered-down version of the international control body envisioned under the Baruch Plan. Based in Vienna, Austria, the IAEA began operating in 1957.<sup>118</sup>

The administration's most ambitious initiative, unveiled by the President on July 21, 1955, at the Geneva summit, was the "Open Skies" proposal to allow aerial photography of U.S. and Soviet military installations. Devoid of any direct arms control content, the proposal aimed to build trust and confidence and to improve the prospects for verification, which Eisenhower and his senior advisors regarded as an essential prerequisite to an effective and credible arms control agreement.<sup>119</sup> Though the precise origins of the offer remain vague, Eisenhower claimed that it arose from studies done by his assistant, Nelson A. Rockefeller, in the weeks leading up to the conference, on avoiding a surprise attack through a system of mutual inspections.<sup>120</sup> The threat of a Pearl Harbor with atomic weapons was practically an obsession within the Eisenhower administration, and over the years it had given rise to numerous schemes to penetrate the veil of secrecy surrounding Soviet military programs and possible preparations for a surprise attack. With the exception of an Air Force-run program to monitor Soviet nuclear experiments, none of these efforts had yielded much useful information.<sup>121</sup>

## EISENHOWER AND THE NEW LOOK

By the mid-1950s, the most promising means of acquiring reliable data on Soviet capabilities and intentions was the U-2, a photo-reconnaissance plane that Lockheed Aircraft was building on a crash basis for the Central Intelligence Agency. Intelligence analysts assumed that orbiting satellites in outer space would someday provide the bulk of the information they needed. But space-based reconnaissance satellites seemed years away and, until then, manned aircraft were the best option. A jet-powered sailplane, the U-2 incorporated design features allowing it to fly above Soviet radar and take pictures with a special high-resolution camera.<sup>122</sup> The Joint Chiefs knew of the U-2, and through the CJCS, who sat on the program's inter-agency oversight committee, they stayed closely abreast of its progress.<sup>123</sup>

The development of a relatively invulnerable aerial reconnaissance capability was increasingly a source of friction between the CIA and the Air Force. Around the same time as the CIA initiated the U-2, the Air Force came up with a competing proposal using a Bell Aircraft design known as the X-16. Eisenhower, however, opposed putting the military in charge of such a program. His main concern was that if uniformed personnel flew the planes over the Soviet Union, the United States might be committing an act of war. He also suspected that if the Defense Department got involved and tried to manage it, the project would become "entangled in the bureaucracy" and mired in "rivalries among the services."<sup>124</sup> Taking these factors into account, Eisenhower decided in late November 1954 that the CIA would have overall authority and that the Air Force would provide assistance as needed to get the planes operational. Moving quickly to exercise its mandate, the CIA redoubled security on all aspects of the U-2, both because of its sensitivity and to minimize what the agency saw as the danger of Air Force encroachment.<sup>125</sup>

By early spring 1955, the U-2 program was nearing the point of its first flight test. Around this same time, the Technological Capabilities Panel (TCP), a select scientific advisory body chaired by James R. Killian, Jr., president of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, tendered a new, top secret threat assessment to the NSC. Addressing the problem of surprise attack, the TCP warned of dire consequences should the Soviets launch a preemptive strike. "For the first time in history," it found, "a striking force could have such power that the first battle could be the final battle, the first punch a knockout." To avoid such a calamity, the panel urged the administration to increase its intelligence gathering, expand its early warning capabilities, and accelerate previously planned improvements in offensive and defensive strategic capabilities.<sup>126</sup> In a separate annex on intelligence available only to the President, the CJCS, and a handful of others, the TCP confirmed the U-2 program's progress and the potential of a follow-on system involving space-based satellites.<sup>127</sup> Though Rockefeller appears not to have been privy to this annex, he probably

suspected its gist from his access to the main report and from having attended a briefing given by Killian and Edwin H. Land, designer of the U-2's camera, to the NSC on March 17, 1955.<sup>128</sup>

At the President's request, Rockefeller organized a special "vulnerabilities panel" made up of social scientists and intelligence experts to assess the prospects for improved verification. The group met at the Quantico, Virginia, Marine Corps base in early June 1955, and it was from these discussions that the aerial inspections proposal emerged.<sup>129</sup> With time running short, Rockefeller made no attempt to solicit JCS views. Instead, he met a few days prior to the Geneva conference in Paris with Radford and Gruenther to discuss the plan. Both agreed that the United States stood to gain more than it would lose. According to Secretary of State Dulles, who was also present, Radford was "in complete accord and indeed enthusiastic."<sup>130</sup>

With foreknowledge of the U-2, Eisenhower presented the Open Skies proposal, certain that he would have access to information derived from overflights of the Soviet Union with or without Soviet cooperation. The Joint Chiefs' first opportunity to comment as a corporate body did not come until after the conference when Secretary of Defense Wilson asked them for suggestions on how to implement the Open Skies proposal. But by then, Soviet Communist Party leader Nikita Khrushchev had vetoed the plan, making any further action on it rather pointless.<sup>131</sup>

The U-2 made its first test flight in early August 1955 and began reconnaissance of the Soviet Union 11 months later, on July 4, 1956. Though never directly involved in the program, the JCS provided advisory and logistical support and assigned a representative to the Ad Hoc Requirements Committee, chaired by the CIA, which decided the planes' missions.<sup>132</sup> Little more was heard of the Open Skies plan and it survives mainly as a footnote to history. At the time, however, it seemed a daring and ambitious initiative and a possible turning point in the Cold War. "I wonder," recalled Ray S. Cline, a veteran intelligence officer who had been with Eisenhower at Geneva, "if [the Soviets] ever regretted it in the following years as the U-2s began doing unilaterally over the USSR what Eisenhower had proposed they do on a reciprocal basis."<sup>133</sup>

Despite Soviet rejection of the Open Skies proposal, Eisenhower persisted in exploring ways of mitigating the threat of a surprise attack, and by September 1958 he persuaded the Soviets to participate in a conference of technical experts to address the issue.<sup>134</sup> By then, however, the focus of arms control efforts had shifted. Widespread public fear of radioactive fallout from atmospheric nuclear testing now overshadowed the danger of another Pearl Harbor and forced the United States to contemplate a moratorium, resisted by the JCS, on above-ground testing.<sup>135</sup> At the same time, with the information gleaned from U-2 flights over the Soviet Union,

the JCS and the President had far better photographic intelligence on Soviet capabilities than ever before. The threat of surprise attack remained, but increasingly it took the form of a Soviet long-range missile program of as yet indistinct proportions, against which existing countermeasures were of questionable value. The strategic environment was again in flux by the mid-to-late 1950s, and as it changed it put renewed pressure on the chiefs to devise appropriate responses.

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## EISENHOWER AND THE NEW LOOK

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