FOR THE SOUL OF MANKIND

THE UNITED STATES, THE SOVIET UNION, AND

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Truman's foreign policy was fairly simple: he did not believe in isolation and he was against dictators. He favored low tariffs, open trade, and military preparedness. But these were not defining issues for him. In the 1930s he was not a crusader against totalitarianism. He spoke rarely about the menace of Nazism or communism. He once said that he hoped Hitler and Stalin would fight each other to extinction, but that was no more than a quip. Ever since his experience in World War I, he gave little thought to international affairs. He did not "give a whoop (to put it mildly) whether there is a League of Nations or whether Russia has a Red government or a purple one."[96]

Truman was simply pro-American. He loved his country, "God's country," as he was fond of calling it.[97] He admired the Constitution, "the greatest document of government ever put together."[98] He cherished American values: liberty, individual opportunity, and free enterprise. He championed the hardworking farmer and laborer and believed government should be used in thoughtful yet limited ways to help them. He opposed big corporations and military big shots. In early 1941, when internationalists were battling isolationists and seeking more support for the beleaguered French and British, Truman turned his attention to investigating the national defense program. He wanted to make sure that contracts were being fairly distributed, production was efficient, money was not being wasted, the fat cats were not getting all the best contracts, and his own Missouri constituents and manufacturers were being well served. Truman beautifully blended parochial nationalism with incipient internationalism. He became a strong proponent of the United Nations.

Even as he gained considerable notoriety as the chair of the Senate committee investigating the defense industry, his simple lifestyle and modest sense of self never changed. He disdained luxury and hated pretense. He woke early, worked hard, and often ate at the local Hot Shoppe.[99] He never ceased writing loving letters to his wife and daughter, who were often back in Independence, Missouri, while he was in Washington. He missed them, and he waited expectantly for their return letters. Yet he loved being a politician, close to the people, seemingly representing their views and getting the government to serve their needs. Once in the Senate, he did not strive for further high office; he did not seek the vice presidency or yearn to occupy the White

House. He had already accomplished more than he expected. He loved politics and liked the legislative infighting. He enjoyed a card game with friends and a glass (or two) of bourbon in the evening.

While Truman was serving his second term in the Senate and gaining the esteem of his colleagues and the attention of the public, the United States moved from depression to war. The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941 killed several thousand Americans, but the continental United States was unscathed by enemy attack. After Hitler declared war on America a few days later, the nation found itself fighting all three Axis powers—Germany, Japan, and Italy—yet fighting them far from America's shores. The American wartime experience was thus vastly different from that endured by any of the other major combatants. Young children and old men were not slaughtered by enemy occupation; sisters, daughters, and mothers were not raped. Homes were not bombed; villages and cities were not ruined.

Hard times ended. After a decade of depression, writes the historian Michael Adams, the "war inaugurated the greatest era of prosperity in human history." American gross national product increased 60 percent during the war; total earnings 50 percent. There was social unrest, labor agitation, racial conflict, and teenage vandalism, but life in America was unimaginably different from life in war-torn Europe and Asia. "Many Americans for the first time in history had more money than they knew what to do with." The numbers of middle-class Americans grew rapidly, as did home ownership. Despite rationing or perhaps because of it, people had more discretionary income than ever before. They bought washers and dryers, jewelry and cigarettes. Average department store purchases soared fivefold, from two to ten dollars, during the war. "Never in the history of human conflict," commented the economist John Kenneth Galbraith, "has there been so much talk of sacrifice and so little sacrifice." Teens, in particular, relished the opportunity to find jobs, make money, and spend it. They were beginning to shape a postwar consumer culture that would become the envy of the world, but nobody then was quite aware of its significance.[100]

Like most Americans during the war, Truman focused his attention on the spectacular rise in America's defense production, industrial capability, and strategic power. By the end of 1942, the United States was producing more arms than all the Axis states together. During 1943 it made almost three times as many armaments as did Soviet Russia. During the remainder of the con-

flict, the United States turned out two-thirds of all the Allied military equipment used in the war: 297,000 aircraft, 193,000 artillery pieces, 86,000 tanks, 2 million army trucks. By the end of the war, it had the capability to produce almost 100,000 planes and 30,000 tanks a year. In four years, overall industrial production doubled; the machine-tool industry trebled. In 1945, the United States had two-thirds of the world's gold reserves, three-fourths of its invested capital, half of its shipping vessels, and half of its manufacturing capacity. Its gross national product was three times that of the Soviet Union and more than five times that of Great Britain. It was also nearing completion of the atomic bomb, a technological and production feat of huge costs and proportions.[101]

Truman went to the Potsdam Conference knowing these facts. He was not eager to cross the ocean to meet his wartime allies, Churchill and Stalin. "How I hate this trip," he confided in his diary. "But I have to make it . . . and we must win."[102] The war in Europe was over, and it was critical to begin talking about postwar settlements for Germany and eastern Europe. It was even more critical to talk to Stalin about the war in the Pacific. Truman wanted Stalin to make good on his promise at Yalta to declare war on Japan within three months of Germany's defeat. If Russians attacked Japanese troops on the Chinese mainland, the Japanese emperor would have fewer troops to kill Americans when they invaded the home islands. This was of utmost importance to Truman, as his plans for the Potsdam Conference were made before the atomic bomb was secretly and successfully tested in New Mexico on 16 July.

Yet Truman was not comfortable fighting wars and planning peace. He knew little of these matters. He read report after report, memo after memo, but diplomacy baffled him. He was inexperienced, and he knew it. "I was so scared," he wrote Bess from Potsdam. "I didn't know whether things were going according to Hoyle or not."[103] His closest associates recognized that he was nervous, uneasy, and insecure. Sometimes he answered so quickly, almost before they finished their questions.[104] At such points, Truman thought he was demonstrating strength, but he was revealing weakness, at least to those who cared most about him.

Truman wanted to get along with Stalin. Some advisers, such as W. Averell Harriman, the American ambassador to the Soviet Union; Secretary of the Navy James V. Forrestal; and Admiral William Leahy, the wartime chief

of staff, wanted him to take a tough stand against the Soviet Union. They told Truman that the Russians were looting eastern Germany and imposing communist regimes in eastern Europe. But Truman felt no passion about these matters, no deep empathy for peoples he neither knew nor understood. Stalin was a dictator, for sure, but one who, Truman felt, had the support of the Russian people. If not, they would not have fought so tenaciously; so let's get along, he jotted in his diary. Truman knew the Soviets were looting eastern Europe, but they had also been "thoroughly looted by the Germans over and over again and you can hardly blame them for their attitude." Truman knew the Soviets were seeking to set up police governments, but he felt that Stalin would eventually bow to American pressure on this issue. He had seen the Kremlin make concessions on the eve of Potsdam. "Yesterday was a hectic day," he wrote to his wife on 7 June 1945. "Had both good news and bad. Stalin agreed to our interpretation of the veto at San Francisco and a reconsideration of the Polish question, but we lost the election in Montana and the Republicans are jubilant over it."[105]

Equating the travail of the Polish people with the disappointment of Democrats in Montana, as he did, he was perfectly well disposed to deal with Stalin. "I want you to understand," he told his good friend Joseph Davies, the pro-Soviet former U.S. ambassador to the Kremlin, "that I am trying my best to save peace and to follow out Roosevelt's plan."[106] The plan was to sustain cooperation between the United States and the Soviet Union and to avoid a postwar rift. But Truman's gut instincts demanded that agreement be on American terms. He told Harriman, "We could not, of course, expect to get 100 percent of what we wanted but . . . on important matters . . . we should be able to get 85 percent."[107] Truman intended to protect American interests, even if he didn't have a precise definition of them. He had no particular sense of gratitude to the Russians for their war losses, no particular reverence for Churchill or the British for their heroism, no particular empathy for the plight of European peoples engulfed by the Depression and war. After several days of meetings at Potsdam with Stalin and Churchill, he wrote, rather proudly, to his wife:

> We had a tough meeting yesterday. I reared up on my hind legs and told 'em where to get off and they got off. I have to make it perfectly plain to them at least once a day that so far as this

president is concerned Santa Claus is dead and that my first interest is U.S.A., then I want the Jap War won and I want 'em both in it. Then I want peace—world peace and will do what can be done by us to get it. But certainly am not going to set up another [illegible] here in Europe, pay reparations, feed the world, and get nothing for it but a nose thumbing. They are beginning to awake to the fact that I mean business.[108]

Business meant getting along with the Russians and protecting U.S. interests. "I like Stalin," he wrote his wife. "He is straightforward. Knows what he wants and will compromise when he can't get it."[109] Differences over impor-

Allied leaders at the Potsdam Conference, 1945. Churchill, Truman, and Stalin still entertained hopes of postwar cooperation—even as they were intensely suspicious of one another's motives.

tant issues were to be expected. Truman felt no outrage about Stalin's record of repression. Not all the horror of Stalin's rule, of course, was then known, but the purges and killing of high party officials were a matter of public record, as was the ruthless suppression of kulaks and other opponents of the regime. Yet none of this mattered too much to the president. Even many years later, he acknowledged that at the time "I liked him a lot. . . . Stalin was a very gracious host, and at the table, he would grasp what was going on as quickly as anybody I ever came in contact with."[110] Those who believe the Cold War was inevitable because of Western horror at Stalin's cruelty are disregarding the contemporary record; those who believe that Truman immediately started the Cold War because of the advice and pressure of anti-Soviet advisers are mistaken. Stalin, Truman thought, was someone you could deal with. He would respect American power. Agreement was still possible.

Truman believed in American power and American righteousness. So did his newly appointed secretary of state, James F. Byrnes. Byrnes was a longtime Washington power broker, a former conservative senator from South Carolina, Supreme Court justice, and wartime overlord of the American economy. Truman liked Byrnes, who had befriended him as a new senator in the mid-1930s, and thought him shrewd, knowledgeable, and tough. He let Byrnes do most of the contentious bargaining at Potsdam on German reparations, Polish borders, and the composition of the new governments in Eastern Europe. Once Stalin agreed in the first days of the conference to attack Japan, Truman felt satisfied. "I've gotten what I came for," he confided to Bess on July 18. "Stalin goes to war August 15 with no strings on it. . . . I'll say that we'll end the war a year sooner now, and think of the kids who won't be killed. That's the important thing."[111]

To Truman and Byrnes, the atomic bomb meant more than the weapon that could defeat Japan and save American lives. It was a vast new instrument of American power. Truman went to Potsdam not knowing it would work; Admiral Leahy said it wouldn't; Byrnes thought it might "but he wasn't sure."[112] By all accounts, and there are many, news of the successful testing of the bomb enormously buoyed Truman's self-confidence. It "took a great load off my mind," he confided to Joe Davies.[113] The president did not order the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima to impress the Russians, as some historians claim; but nevertheless he believed that it would impress them and make them more manageable.

At Potsdam, Truman quietly took Stalin aside and elliptically mentioned that the United States had a powerful new weapon to use against Japan. Nothing more needed to be said. Nor did all the pressing issues have to be resolved at Potsdam. Truman was eager to go home. He grew impatient with the incessant haggling at the conference. Stalin, he thought, was stalling. He "doesn't know it," Truman again wrote his wife, "but I have an ace in the hole and another one showing—so unless he has threes or two pair (and I know he has not) we are sitting all right."[114] The "atomic bomb," Byrnes also was thinking, "had given us great power, and . . . in the last analysis, it would control."[115]

When Truman ordered that atomic bombs be dropped on Hiroshima and then Nagasaki, these were not tough decisions for him. They were necessary, in his mind, to save American lives. They vividly demonstrated American power; they confirmed that enemies of America would pay for their transgressions. The Japanese did pay, and then they capitulated, unconditionally, except for the preservation of the emperor. They had little choice, for Stalin's troops attacked at the same time, seized parts of Manchuria, invaded northern Korea, and set their sights on Hokkaido, Japan's northernmost home island.[116]

The war ended. The American people celebrated. Truman breathed a sigh of relief. He now eagerly delegated the responsibility for peacemaking to Secretary of State Byrnes, who he thought had performed ably at Potsdam. Truman wanted to turn his own attention to demobilization, reconversion, and the domestic issues he knew and understood. Byrnes for his part was eager to take command of the nation's foreign policy. He was sure of himself. The atomic bomb, he told his closest colleagues, was a great weapon that could be used to exact concessions from potential adversaries.[117] But experienced colleagues in the State and War departments had their doubts. They deeply resented Byrnes's attempts to monopolize American diplomacy. Many of them left office in September and October 1945, however, exhausted from years of wartime responsibility, and Byrnes was now in charge.

Byrnes was not as shrewd as he thought he was, nor was the Soviet Union easily threatened. At the first postwar meeting of foreign ministers in London in September, Byrnes thought he could outmaneuver Molotov and arrange for more representative governments in Romania and Bulgaria. But Molotov chafed at Byrnes's procedural moves and sneered at his not very subtle efforts

to use America's atomic monopoly to leverage concessions. In fact, the Soviet foreign minister was willing to negotiate on some of these points—that is, until Stalin ordered him to stiffen his resolve. Let the conference end in deadlock, Stalin wired Molotov. Let Byrnes stew for a while. Stalin's adulatory comments about Byrnes in front of Truman at Potsdam had, typically, concealed the dictator's emerging contempt for a man who wielded power so flagrantly.[118]

Byrnes returned to Washington chastened. The Russians would not be intimidated, he realized. Perhaps, Byrnes now thought, the bomb could be used as a carrot rather than a stick. Perhaps the Soviets could be lured into a favorable agreement to regulate the future of atomic energy. Some of the Soviets' arguments, he believed, had merit. He had to concede a certain hypocrisy in the American insistence that the Soviets open up eastern Europe while the United States locked the Kremlin out of Japan. He could understand why the Soviets feared the revival of German power and why they wanted friendly governments on their periphery. It might make sense, he thought, to acquiesce to what was happening in Bulgaria and Romania, more or less, if in return the Kremlin promised to withdraw Soviet troops as soon as the peace treaties were negotiated. Moreover, a four-power treaty guaranteeing the demilitarization of Germany might hasten this process. In other words, Stalin's obsession with security might be assuaged by a demilitarization treaty while his domination of eastern Europe might be diluted by his agreement to withdraw Soviet troops from Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria, as they just had been withdrawn from Czechoslovakia.[119]

To achieve an open sphere in eastern Europe, contain Soviet power, sustain the wartime alliance, and avoid hostile confrontations with Soviet Russia may have made sense, but Byrnes's swift tactical changes coupled with his arrogant behavior alienated cabinet colleagues, powerful senators, and key presidential aides. Truman grew frustrated with Byrnes, as he did with so many of his advisers in that autumn of 1945. The end of the war provided no respite for the inexperienced president. He was worried by labor strife and spiraling inflation. He was agitated by the biting criticism he was experiencing and by the souring of his party's prospects to win the 1946 midterm elections. "The Congress," he noted in his diary, "is balking; labor has gone crazy; management is not far from insane in selfishness." His cabinet had "Potomac fever."[120] Byrnes was conniving, striving for too much publicity,

Molotov and Stalin, 1945. After Potsdam, Stalin ordered Molotov to take a tough stand in negotiating with the Americans and British.

acting too independent, arousing too much controversy, trying to be too clever, and alienating friends and foes alike.

Truman liked things in black and white. His closest advisers knew that he did not like nuance or ambiguity.[121] In a major speech on Navy Day, 27 October, he set forth his views. The United States, he said, forswore the acquisition of any new territory. It championed democracy and self-determination. It favored freedom of the seas, open trade, and global economic cooperation. It supported the United Nations and Pan-Americanism. There would be no return to isolationism. Never again, said Truman, would the United States be caught by surprise. Never again would it relinquish its military superiority. It would hold the atomic bomb as a "sacred trust" for all mankind. Its air and naval forces would control the seas and dominate the skies. Aggression

would not be tolerated. America's interests would not be slighted nor would its ideals be compromised. The United States would not "compromise with evil."[122]

Although his writers designed the speech to force "our diplomatic appeasers to pay closer attention to the vital interests of America," there is no reason to think that Truman thought he was breaking new ground with this speech.[123] These ideals and interests were like apple pie and ice cream to Truman. The nation had to be strong and it had to be involved. Its interests and ideals had to be protected. This was, after all, God's country. The war had taught key lessons: no more surprise attacks, no more aggression. The United States had to be able to project its power far from American shores. The country needed bases around the globe. And no nation could be permitted to upset the balance of power in the Old World and gain control of the industrial infrastructure, raw materials, and skilled manpower of Europe and Asia. Germany and Japan had almost achieved this in the late 1930s and early 1940s, and American interests and ideals had been jeopardized. This could not be allowed to happen again.

The president jotted his thoughts on a piece of paper. Byrnes had to stop "babying" the Soviets. The Soviets had to get out of northern Iran, where they had been slow to withdraw their troops. They had to stop putting pressure on Turkey for bases in the Dardanelles. They had to install more democratic governments in Bulgaria and Romania. They had to agree to strong central governments in Korea and China. "Unless Russia is faced with an iron fist and strong language another war is in the making."[124]