

The Geopolitics of Containment

*Reappraising American Foreign Policy
During the Early Cold War, 1945-1953*

Master's Thesis

Thomas W. Bottelier

303010

23-08-2011

Supervisor: dr. B. Wubs

Global History & International Relations

Erasmus School of History, Culture & Communication

Contents

Abbreviations	3
Figures & Tables	4
Introduction	5
1. The Literature	11
2. What Is Geopolitics?	23
3. The Early Cold War	36
4. Geopolitics in the Sources	49
5. The Geopolitics of Containment	58
6. A Closed World	81
Consulted Literature	84
Archival Collections	86

Abbreviations

DHTP	Documentary History of the Truman Presidency
FRUS	Foreign Relations of the United States
TOF	President Harry S. Truman Office Files
CF	Correspondence File
SF	Subject File

Figures & Tables

Figure 2.1: Mackinder's Heartland Theory	29
Figure 2.2: Spykman's Rimland Theory	34
Figure 5.1: Front & back cover of the 1947 War Department handbook	69
Table 1. Frequency of geopolitical terms in policy documents according to year, 1945-1952	53
Table 2. Frequency of specific geopolitical terms in documents influenced by geopolitics (in percentages)	55

Introduction

Russia, wrote George F. Kennan in 1946, has “learned to seek security only in a patient and deadly struggle for the total destruction of a rival power, never in compacts or compromises with it.” In this single sentence the American diplomat expressed an idea of the conduct of that nation which would dominate the foreign policy of the United States for years to come. In so doing he laid the basis for the strategy that would lie at the center of American international relations for the better part of half a century: containment. With this policy President Harry S. Truman committed his country to preventing the Soviet Union from expanding any further than it already had in World War Two.¹

Kennan wrote, and containment was developed, at a time that has been described as the “second moment of U.S. global ambition,” following a first in the wake of First World War.² The nation had just emerged victorious from the Second and stood at the zenith of its power. It had defeated and occupied all of its enemies, its potential rivals among the victors were war-ravaged and destitute, and American industrial strength could be matched by none. “The dimensions of its might were unprecedented,” to use the words of Paul Kennedy.³

There was only one nation that could even remotely withstand the comparison with the United States: the Soviet Union. It had withstood the brunt of the Nazi war effort and won, and its forces had penetrated deep into Central Europe, stopping in Berlin, Prague, and Vienna. Effectively the Soviets now controlled everything from there to Moscow. Yet the nation was devastated. It had suffered by far the highest percentage of casualties of any of the major powers, and much of its agricultural and industrial heartland now lay in ruins. The Soviets, at least on paper, formed no threat to the United States.

However, only a few years later, the United States and the Soviet Union had become bitter enemies in a global conflict that became known as the Cold War. Why? This is a question that has vexed historians for decades. Its answer is the key to explaining the origins of the Cold War; knowing them is crucial if one is to understand the international environment of the past sixty years.

Given the state of American power immediately after World War Two, it goes without saying

¹ *Documentary History of the Truman Presidency* (hereafter: DHTP): 7, Document 9: Kennan to the Department of State, February 22, 1946. John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of containment: A critical reappraisal of postwar American national security policy* (New York 1982) 4.

² Neil Smith, *American empire: Roosevelt's geographer and the prelude to globalization* (Berkeley 2004) xiii.

³ Paul Kennedy, *The rise and fall of the Great Powers: Economic change and military conflict from 1500 to 2000* (London 1988) 460.

that at least part of the answer is to be found in the actions of the United States. American actions in this period were dominated by its desire to contain the Soviet Union. Studying containment may therefore produce the greatest yields, if the goal is to understand the American role in the origins of the Cold War. Containment was directed against the Soviet Union, and what was the Cold War if not a serious breakdown in Soviet-American relations?

Containment, however, is a broad topic. It has been studied and discussed for decades, by a great deal of distinguished scholars, much like the related subject of the causes of the Cold War. Is it consequently still possible to contribute meaningfully to this long and complicated debate? In answer to this it must be said that some aspects of containment have not received as much attention as others. It has been called a strategy of expansionism, or a defensive measure. Some historians of containment have emphasized the policy-making process behind containment, and the perceptions which were a part of it. The analysis then comes to center on the way members of the administration thought, as expressed in the documents they wrote. Such an approach provides precise insight into the background of decisions that had a decisive impact on the course of the Cold War.

Focusing on the thought of policy-makers means focusing on that which influenced it. How did they come to their assessments of the Soviet Union and their judgments of the world situation? This is where the question of geopolitics comes in. Geopolitics is a body of international relations theory that was especially influential during the interwar period. Its aim is to study the effect of geography on international relations. The ideas of several of its most influential practitioners reveal striking parallels with the containment policy of the Truman Presidency. Not only did they share a preoccupation with (perceived) Soviet expansionism, but also a concept of dealing with it. The solutions offered by these geopoliticians were in many ways the same as containment. This becomes all the more interesting when one realizes that their theories predated containment. The question presents itself: was there causality? Are the manifest similarities between containment and geopolitics mere coincidence, or was the Truman administration's strategy actually influenced by geopolitics?

“Each century has had its own geographical perspective,” Halford Mackinder, one of the earliest geopoliticians, wrote in 1919. Whether or not centuries have a geographical perspective of their own, it is certainly possible that governments do. Seeking out the geographical perspective of the Truman administration will reveal a side of containment that has not received the attention it deserves.⁴

⁴ H. J. Mackinder, *Democratic ideals and reality* (London 1919) 34.

Research questions

From the very general questions asked above, several concrete research questions follow:

- Was American foreign policy influenced by geopolitics in the early Cold War (1945-1953), and if so, how?
 - What is geopolitics?
 - What was U.S. foreign policy in the early Cold War?
 - How often are geopolitical theories mentioned in the consulted primary sources?

The main question is descriptive in nature. This means investigating both the nature and claims of theories of geopolitics, as well as that of American foreign policy in the early Cold War. It is formulated as a yes-or-no question initially (“Was (...) influenced?”) because this is an aspect of early Cold War history that has not extensively been studied. It is also a question that needs to be answered before moving on to describing the exact nature of the influence geopolitical theories may have had on U.S. foreign policy. There is no problem in the descriptive nature of the main research question. It is accompanied by a hypothesis, the possible falsification of which will make up for any lack of analysis that may be encased in the main question.

The first sub-question is even more clearly descriptive than the main question. Answering it gives the reader a good overview and understanding of geopolitics. This is important, because without understanding the nature of geopolitical theories there is no way to distinguish any possible influence they may have had on containment.

The second sub-question is intended to provide an overview of the history of American foreign policy under the Truman administration. This was dominated by the policy of containment. Like the first, it is also entirely descriptive. Answering this question is of course crucial because the historical context of the problem cannot be ignored. Furthermore, coupled with the geopolitical framework from the first sub-question, the history forms a useful background for the reader before beginning the analysis of the primary source material. Both of the sub-questions are therefore crucial building blocks for answering the main question.

The last sub-question is intended to provide part of the answer to the main research question. It was formulated separately because it involves a quantitative approach which is different from the qualitative approach implied in the main research question. Subjecting the research problem to a quantitative analysis provides a valuable supplementary argument in the final thesis, providing a clearer

view of the question of geopolitics in containment policy.

Scientific relevance

So far, the scientific relevance of the present topic has only been briefly touched upon. This lies primarily in the fact that the precise relationship between theories of geopolitics and containment has gotten little attention from most scholars. It is worthwhile to consider the academic significance of my thesis at greater length, however.

A single look at the bibliography will reveal that the consulted literature includes only one work by a scholar who examined the relationship between geopolitics and foreign policy of the United States. This is the book by G. R. Sloan, *Geopolitics in U.S. Strategic Policy*, published in 1988, which examines this relationship in the period between 1890 and 1987. Sloan, a lecturer in strategic studies at the Britannia Royal Naval College in Dartmouth, writes both a history of geopolitical thinking in the century before his book's publication, as well as an analysis of the way geopolitics influenced U.S. foreign policy in that same period. It therefore represents an important previous work on the same subject. This raises questions about the possibility of redundancy. In reply, it is necessary to remark that Sloan's work first of all deals with a far longer period than dealt with here: roughly a century compared to less than eight years. Second, Sloan's analysis suffers from methodological weaknesses (see below). Considering the fact that it has been more than twenty years since the publication of Sloan's monograph, there are sources he may not have had access to. Finally, perhaps his conclusions can be refined in the present study.

Regardless of the above, it is important to notice that the book by Sloan remains the only work consulted so far that deals directly with the relation between geopolitics and policy. The rest of the literature on geopolitics either discusses its merits as a field of study, or its history as an academic discipline. In most of the consulted literature on Cold War history, geopolitics is sometimes named, but only in passing and quite briefly. This suggests that there is some generally held assumption among Cold War historians that geopolitics bears some relation to U.S. foreign policy (in reference to which it is most often cited), but the terms of this relation remain vague, and, not to forget, the assumption remains untested.

For instance, John Lewis Gaddis cites primary source material which can be linked to classical geopolitical theory in his famous 1982 book on containment policy. George F. Kennan, the “architect of containment,” for instance, was concerned with denying the Soviet Union control of more than one

center of industrial and economic potential (which was exactly what the Heartland Theory, for instance, predicted it would do). He told an audience at the National War College that restoring a “Eurasian balance of power” should be of prime importance to the United States; denying one power domination of the “Eurasian land mass” was vital. Early on, National Security Council reports directly cited Mackinder's heartland theory in assessing the Soviet threat, as Gaddis notes himself.⁵

This, however, is done on a single page and only in passing. Serious research into the possibility of concrete geopolitical influences on national security policy has been quite uncommon. Considering the literature, it is fair to say that the role geopolitics may have played in the making of U.S. foreign policy early in the Cold War has been overlooked. This is remarkable, given the obvious parallels between the thinking of some geopoliticians (especially the influential members of the Anglo-Saxon school) and the containment strategy eventually employed by the Americans.

Methodology

Given these brief, yet tantalizing statements by accomplished authors on this subject, and also considering the main research question, the following hypothesis can be formulated: geopolitics had a measurable influence on U.S. foreign policy from 1945 to 1953. Falsifiable as it is, it contributes to a more interesting and academically engaging narrative than merely answering the largely descriptive research questions. Crucial to answering the main question is the problem of influence. What is influence? How does one measure it? The answer is to combine a quantitative with a qualitative approach in order to be able to answer these questions.

The quantitative approach is simple. The amount of primary sources exhibiting the influence of geopolitics is compared to the total amount of consulted sources. In addition to this, the use of geopolitical terminology in archival documents will likewise be counted, to get an impression of what geopolitical concepts were important within the Truman administration.

The qualitative approach is one of textual analysis. Describing and then analyzing the primary source material, which consists of internal documents of the Truman administration such as memorandums, letters or reports, will reveal the nature of any influence of geopolitics on containment policy, if indeed there is any. The objective is to break down the structure of and the arguments contained in such documents, in the hope that doing so will reveal any geopolitical way of thinking

⁵ John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of containment: A critical appraisal of postwar American national security policy* (New York 1982) 33. Gaddis, *Strategies of containment*, 39. *Ibid.*, 57-58.

within the administration. The result of this exercise will be to reconstruct the thought of Truman and his advisers, not only when it comes to geopolitics, but also relating to Soviet policy as a whole. It is only through such a method that it will become possible to say in what ways exactly American foreign policy during this period was influenced by geopolitics.

It is necessary at this point to briefly turn to the primary sources.⁶ In the search for the influence of geopolitics on containment, the best place to start seemed to be the official, classified office papers of the Truman administration. These are spread across several archives, but a great deal can be found in the Harry S. Truman Papers, held at the Harry S. Truman Library. The University Press of America has published two collections based on this extensive archive, out of which the bulk of the primary source material was selected. These are the *Harry S. Truman Office Files*, and the *Documentary History of the Truman Presidency*, the first of which is on microfilm, the latter collected in thirty-five volumes. The documents found within were all highly classified and therefore provide ample material with which to reconstruct the policy-making process, and the thought going into it, at the highest echelons of the administration. The selected documents include memorandums, letters, telegrams, and reports, dealing with the various major foreign policy issues of the period.

By combining a quantitative with a qualitative approach, a more complete picture of the influence of geopolitics will emerge. Where the first method will reveal the extent and frequency of geopolitical thinking within the Truman administration, the second method will show the nature of the phenomenon. This is especially crucial to demonstrate how geopolitics fit into the general mode of thought on containment within the administration. Before that is possible, however, it is necessary to review the literature on both subjects, geopolitics and containment, to understand what the academic has produced so far.

⁶ The primary sources are more extensively reviewed below, p. 48-49.

1. The Literature

The history of the Cold War is a contentious field. Perhaps the most divisive subject within it is the origin of the conflict. Why did it happen? Who was to blame? Before one can write the history of geopolitics in U.S. early Cold War policy, however, it is essential to explore the historiography of the subject. What has been written on geopolitics, and on the history of the Cold War? Considering the lack of consensus, the debate must first be explored before contributing to it. A critical overview of the consulted literature, ordered chronologically so that any changes in thinking over time may be traced, is therefore in order.

Geopolitics and the origins of the Cold War are two largely separate subjects. While the two are certainly connected, previous writing on both subjects seems largely to have been carried out separately. Intellectual histories of geopolitical theory take the entire twentieth century as their time period; Cold War histories deal with a decidedly shorter period, especially if their focus is the conflict's early phase. The debate below is therefore split into two, one section on geopolitics, and another on the early Cold War.

The historiography of geopolitics

The historiography of geopolitics encompasses a period that spans the second half of the twentieth century. The earliest article included was published in 1960, the last work is from 2009. Generally, however, the debate shows a striking amount of continuity, with scholars of recent years often in agreement with the arguments of their predecessors from twenty or even forty years before. In recent years, however, a debate has emerged as a result of the challenge mounted against traditional geopolitics by its postmodern critics, working under the banner of “critical geopolitics.” Examples of such critics include the Irish political scientist Gerard Toal, who has subjected geopolitical theories to postmodern deconstruction, and the American anthropologist Neil Smith, who has examined the geopolitical background of what he calls the American “empire.” They criticize the assumptions, truth claims, and terminology of the field of geopolitics, seeking to undermine its claims of objectivity. This has run into opposition from scholars with more traditional views, such as early modern historian Jeremy Black, who defends the realist approach of the majority of geopoliticians.

Another controversy exists about the interpretation of Halford Mackinder's theory of geopolitics, the so-called Heartland Theory. Most scholars think that Mackinder's theory only changed

(over a period of forty years) in the geographical areas and concepts the British geographer created, but some consider him to have radically revised his theory toward the end of his life. There are also some differences of opinion when it comes to assessing the influence geopolitical theories had on the making of policy, though these are nowhere near as pronounced as the debate on Mackinder.

The historiography of geopolitical studies provides a strong argument for the claim that U.S. foreign and strategic policy had a geopolitical background that went back many decades before the Cold War. This strengthens the contention that the first Cold War administration had its own geographical perspective as well.

Ladis Kristof (1960) writes a history of geopolitical thinking, stretching back to pre-modern times. His article provides an interesting look into the intellectual origins of geopolitics, a field of study focusing on societies and political constructs put in their geographical context. He shows that as an intellectual tradition, geopolitics is a typical product of modernity. Its goal to base politics on a “solid empirical basis,” as Kristof writes, is also a typical example of positivist thinking. Significant is the fact that Kristof, who predates the other consulted literature on geopolitics by at least twenty years, in large part shares the narrative of later scholars about the field. That is to say, he shares their appraisal of its intellectual foundations (i.e. the relationship between man and nature), as well as their criticism of its truth claims (principally its positivist aspects). This suggests that there is continuity over many years in the study of geopolitical theories and their history.⁷

Geoffrey Parker's (1985) work is an intellectual history of geopolitics, from the field's origins in the *fin de siècle* period to the state of the field in the early eighties. The central tenet of Parker's argument is that geopolitical theories aim to study and understand the world from a spatial or geocentric viewpoint. In that sense, geopolitical theorists believe “that power is firmly rooted in the physical nature of the world itself.” The aim is always “to understand the whole,” that is to say, the entire international system. The author explicitly limits himself to *Western* geopolitical thought, by which he means works on the subject as conducted in Germany, France, Great Britain, and the United States. Geopolitical theory as formulated in, for instance, the Soviet Union is thus deliberately left out of the picture.⁸

Parker divides his book into eleven chapters. These are more or less chronologically ordered, from “the roots of twentieth-century geopolitical thought” to later work. The chapters that deal with

⁷ Ladis Kristof, 'The origins and evolution of geopolitics', *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 4:1 (1960) 42-46.

⁸ Parker, *Western geopolitical thought*, 1-3. Ibid., 7.

pre-WWII thinking are, in addition, divided according to the schools prevalent in the aforementioned countries. It should be remarked that British and, of course, American theories of geopolitics are most relevant to U.S. foreign policy (following Østerud; see below).

Parker's is quintessentially an intellectual history. He does not devote much time or space to any connections between theories of geopolitics and policy-making, with the exception of his chapter on German geopolitics (which came to be an important propaganda tool for the Nazis). Because of this, the book is principally useful for tracing the development of geopolitical theory throughout most of the twentieth century, as well as for gaining an understanding of what theories were prevalent.

Because his is a study of the history of geopolitics, Parker discusses a great deal of theories and theorists all through the twentieth century. Not all of these are relevant to this thesis, however: the most important are, as said, those from the Anglo-Saxon world. Of these, the most significant are Alfred Thayer Mahan, Halford Mackinder, and Nicholas J. Spykman. There are others, of course, but the ideas of these three had the most influence, and continue to be referenced and discussed to this day.

An important element in Parker's argument is the gradual change he traces in Mackinder's theory. The British geographer elaborated on it in three separate works: the first in 1904, the second in 1919, and the last in 1943. The 1904 and 1919 versions conform, according to Parker, to what is written above. The author claims that the addition, in 1943, by Mackinder of a "Midland Ocean" (the Atlantic) and his advocating the postwar maintenance of the alliance with the Soviet Union (in order to curtail further German aggression) was a radical departure from the 1919 version. In effect, Parker says, Mackinder abandoned the dichotomy between land and sea power. This is a view that differs from those of almost all of his colleagues.⁹

In the context of the early Cold War, it is interesting to note that Parker refers to a "Spykman-Kennan thesis of containment." He also mentions the existence of a so-called "barbershop geopolitics" in the interwar United States. This indicates that geopolitical theories were anything but obscure in the period leading up the Cold War, as far as Parker is concerned, and were in fact discussed openly and often by ordinary people.¹⁰

Øyvind Østerud (1988), reviewing several geopolitical works, gives an overview of the state of affairs in the study of geopolitical theory as it stood in the late 1980s. Parker is among the scholars whose work Østerud reviews. He considers Parker's book especially valuable when it comes to the

⁹ Parker, *Western geopolitical thought*, 121-123.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 141. *Ibid.*, 102.

descriptions of geopolitical theory in the first half of the twentieth century, and only criticizes Parker's assessment of the field of geopolitics from the 1960s onward. Interestingly, Østerud seems to regard the British and American schools of geopolitics mentioned above as one Anglo-Saxon whole. This implies that geopolitical theorists such as Mahan, Mackinder, and Spykman may indeed be the most relevant to U.S. policy, as opposed to, for instance, their German or French colleagues. Finally, Østerud provides a worthwhile synthesis of geopolitical scholarship which puts the theories discussed in perspective.¹¹

Out of all the consulted literature, G.R. Sloan's 1988 book is the only work which does more than simply mention the relation between geopolitics and containment in passing (which is the norm among most other authors). It is a study of the relationship between United States strategic and foreign policy and theories of geopolitics. Sloan divides his book into two parts: one in which he examines geopolitical thought as it existed in his chosen time period, and another in which he investigates the relationship between geopolitical theories and U.S. foreign (or, as he calls it, strategic) policy. He distinguishes three separate periods in that relationship: before the Second World War; the era of containment; and the contemporary international situation.

The major weakness of his book is that Sloan fails to clearly state what he considers to be a part of the relation between geopolitics and state policy. How does one influence the other? For this, he formulates three separate scenarios: one in which policy is a direct result of the recommendations and/or actions of a geopolitical theorist (Sloan regards this as rare but possible); another in which there is no connection whatsoever (which he claims is unsatisfactory from an *a priori* point of view, since it would take research to prove it); and a final one, where theories of geopolitics shape the perceptions and thinking of policymakers, to paraphrase the author. Sloan never specifies how exactly this would have worked, or how he intends to draw proof for it from the sources he consults.¹²

Sloan's view on the geopolitical theory of Halford Mackinder differs remarkably from that of Parker. Parker claimed that Mackinder rejected the dichotomy between land and sea power, central to his theory, in a 1943 article. Sloan, meanwhile, takes the opposite view entirely. According to him, there is much greater continuity between the different publications of Mackinder's theory than Parker sees. The major difference between Mackinder's 1943 paper and his 1919 book, writes Sloan, is the addition of a new area of great geographical importance, the Midland Ocean (Mackinder's name for the Atlantic). Sloan attributes no importance to Mackinder's calls for the maintenance of the wartime

¹¹ Østerud, 'Uses and abuses', 192. Ibid., 193-195 & 196.

¹² G. R. Sloan, *Geopolitics in United States strategic policy, 1890-1987* (Brighton 1988), xi-xiii.

alliance after victory. When it comes to the change of opinion Parker maintains Mackinder had regarding the contradiction between land and sea power, Sloan argues instead that the British geographer added the Midland Ocean because only this area could be expected to help maintain the global balance of power following the war. The Soviet victory on the Eastern Front, already apparent in 1943, essentially confirmed the fears Mackinder had expressed back in 1904. Here Sloan in fact argues that Mackinder did not abandon the idea that land power naturally opposes sea power, but that he reaffirmed it!¹³

Because his book is ultimately about the influence of geopolitical theory on U.S. foreign policy, Sloan spends a chapter examining the early Cold War period, entitled “Geopolitics and the Containment Era.” As explained above, he had conceived of three different kinds of relationship between geopolitics and foreign policy: a direct one, one without any relationship at all, and one where geopolitics “molded” the decision-making process. Sloan maintains that in the early Cold War, the third kind of relationship prevailed. Again, it is important to note that he is the only scholar who has attempted to analyze the relation of geopolitics to containment more closely than ordinary.¹⁴

Gerard Toal (1994), an authority on geopolitics, looks at the subject in a way differing radically from that of Kristof, Parker, or Sloan. His article can be described as an exercise in “meta-geopolitics,” for he reflects on the philosophical assumptions underlying theories of geopolitics, placing the field in its historical context. For instance, he elaborates on the way geopolitics can be used to make and/or justify government policy, though he argues that it is not so much “advice” to the state as it is a certain discourse or narrative of the way states should act. Toal, then, represents a new, postmodern school of thought within the field of geopolitics, which is a useful addition to the literature, if only because it provides an original counterweight to the more traditional views on geopolitical theory seen elsewhere in the historiography.¹⁵

In two articles, published on the University of North Carolina's website and written in 1999 and 2004, Francis P. Sempa examines the thinking of Mackinder and Spykman respectively. His is a traditional view on geopolitical theory. He also elaborates on Mackinder and Spykman's views on appropriate global strategy, derived from their theoretical insights, and the ways these influenced policy. Both men, for instance, were primarily concerned with finding and maintaining a workable

¹³ Sloan, *Geopolitics*, 13. *Ibid.*, 6-15. *Ibid.*, 60-61.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 130-143.

¹⁵ Gerard Toal, 'Problematizing geopolitics: Survey, statesmanship and strategy', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, New Series 19:3 (1994) 269-270.

balance of power on the Eurasian continent. The articles provide a useful insight into the geographical thinking of both geopolitical theorists, and the implications of their geographical conceptualizations (such as the “Heartland” and the “Rimland”). Furthermore, Sempa shows how both theorists came to be known beyond geographical circles to a wider public: Mackinder, for example, came to be rediscovered during the Second World War in the United States, as his theories seemed to regain their relevance. This makes them useful for both understanding the ideas of these theorists, as well as placing them in their historical context.¹⁶

Neil Smith (2004) writes extensively about the relationship between geopolitics and government policy *before* the Truman administration, in his book about Johns Hopkins University president and geographer Isaiah Bowman (1878 – 1950). Smith argues that the forgotten history of the influence Bowman (who was also founder and later president of the Council on Foreign Relations) had in government circles, focuses attention on the geographical aspects of the American rise toward hegemony. Smith, a self-declared leftist who is critical of U.S. foreign policy, promises to “piece together the historical geography of U.S. global ambition.” He contends that there was an important geographical aspect to both the first (after the First World War) and second (during and after the Second World War) “moments of American empire.” The understanding of geopolitics as formulated by Mackinder and others was an important contribution to this according to Smith. Bowman (and therefore the U.S. government) “owed a debt to Mackinder.” In so doing, he reaffirms the postmodern criticism leveled against geopolitics by Toal: geopolitics was the handmaiden of U.S. hegemony.¹⁷

It is important to note that, considering the periodization Smith adopts with his “moments of empire,” he involves himself in the debate on the origins of the Cold War (see below). He is adamant that the American role in causing the Cold War was strongly geopolitical in nature, though he affirms the traditional revisionist point of view that it was economic and corporate interest that drove the U.S. to expand, which in turn was the main cause of the Cold War (Cold War revisionism is discussed at greater length below).¹⁸

As editor of a volume on Mackinder's theory placed in the context of twentieth-century history as well as recent events, Brian W. Blouet (2005) contributes a valuable addition to the bibliography. While encompassing a period that begins considerably before the Truman Presidency, and ends far later

¹⁶ Francis P. Sempa, 'Mackinder's world,' http://www.unc.edu/depts/diplomat/AD_Issues/amdipl_14/sempa_mac1.html (05-01-2011). Francis P. Sempa, 'Spykman's world', http://www.unc.edu/depts/diplomat/item/2006/0406/semp/sempa_spykman.html (05-01-2011).

¹⁷ Smith, *American empire*, 25. Ibid., 27.

¹⁸ Ibid., 22 & 373.

(in 2003), the articles represent the latest scholarship on the Heartland Theory. Interestingly, Blouet himself, in the introduction, argues that Mackinder in fact advocated a policy of containment in his 1943 article, in order to dam the Soviet Union in now that it had finally advanced beyond the confinement of its great “natural fortress” (as Mackinder called it). This goes directly against Parker's claims, as well.¹⁹

British military historian Jeremy Black's 2009 book, *Geopolitics*, seeks to connect the study of history with the field of geopolitics. It was written as a direct reaction to what he calls “critical geopolitics,” by which he means the kind of postmodern criticism leveled against the discipline by scholars such as Toal. Black defends the tenets and claims of realism (in which geopolitics is rooted), and thus resolutely rejects the attempts by the postmodern geopoliticians at deconstructing the field's discourse (as they see it). Black accuses critical geopolitics of being motivated by a powerful political bias, mainly aimed at the international role of the United States. He accuses them of developing a “particular discourse” to “replace common sense” with what Black regards as a self-congratulatory, academically dishonest, and “politically partisan” approach that has little to do with proper geopolitical study. *Geopolitics* appears to be a direct reaction to Smith's biography of Isaiah Bowman discussed above: according to Black, Smith is a prominent author within critical geopolitics. He accuses Smith of letting his partisan bias against the United States color his work and cloud his judgment, citing several instances where Smith compares U.S. expansion as a search for “Lebensraum” as proof for the fact that Smith is attempting to vilify what he regards as the American “empire.”²⁰

In essence, Black argues that critical geopolitics is ideologically motivated. He seeks to reaffirm, in response to the postmodernism or constructivism of critical geopolitics, the realist paradigm in the study of geopolitics, using history to do so. He is concerned with showcasing the objective aspects in geopolitics, that is evidence of the incorrectness of critical geopolitics, and holds that the latter treats geopolitics as no more than a justification for empire. In his chapter on geopolitics and the Cold War, he emphasizes the continuity between classical geopolitical theories (such as Mackinder's), and the geopolitical views of successive U.S. governments in the Cold War. The latter was expressed in such terminology as Kennan's “points” and “lines,” or the Domino Theory.²¹

¹⁹ Brian W. Blouet (ed.), *Global geostrategy: Mackinder and the defence of the West* (New York 2005) 6.

²⁰ Jeremy Black, *Geopolitics* (London 2009) 1-6.

²¹ Black, *Geopolitics*, 141-143.

The historiography of the early Cold War

The historiography of the early Cold War is vast and diverse subject, full of lively debates and clear differences of opinion. It is important to note that there is no clear consensus remaining on the beginnings of the conflict. As a result it becomes necessary to select relevant literature with great care. In addition, it is equally important to provide adequate context to a particular selection, so that the reader may understand the position of the present study in the debate.

The focus of the present overview is on the historiography of containment. This is because that policy was the most important strategic policy formulated by the U.S. in the period in question. To a lesser extent, the emphasis is on the debate over the origins of the Cold War, and then only to the American side of the story. The latter subject is based on several relatively recent articles.

The historiography of the Cold War's causes is as extensive as it is filled with controversy. It stretches back almost to the beginning of the conflict itself, and includes several schools of thought, which have had the tendency to proliferate over the course of time. In the past fifty years of scholarship on the origins of the Cold War, there have been, generally speaking, two major schools which managed to achieve some sort of consensus or dominance: a “traditionalist” or “orthodox” school predominating until the 1960s, and a “revisionist” school challenging the traditionalists, which dominated until the late 1970s. In the traditionalist narrative, the Soviet Union was a dangerous, paranoid, and expansionist power which threatened the postwar world order. In essence, traditionalists held, Moscow's plans for world domination caused the Cold War, and it was the right (indeed, the duty) of the United States to react in order to stop the communist superpower. Revisionists, in turn, radically opposed such a view of postwar history, contending that it was not in fact the Soviets that were to blame for the escalation of the conflict, but the United States. Revisionists emphasized the vast strength the Americans had accrued following the Second World War (controlling over half of the world's industrial output, for instance), and the weakness of the Soviet Union by comparison. If the Soviet Union was too weak to be a legitimate threat in the immediate postwar years, revisionists argued, then American expansionism was to blame for the Cold War. A desire for access to free markets and raw materials for American companies drove Washington to challenge the Soviet order in Eastern Europe, and fear the threat posed by international communism.²²

²² David S. Painter & Melvyn P. Leffler, 'Introduction: the international system and the origins of the Cold War', in Melvyn P. Leffler & David S. Painter (eds.), *Origins of the Cold War: An international history* (New York & Milton Park 2005) 1-4. Michael Cox, 'From the Truman Doctrine to the second superpower detente: The rise and fall of the Cold War', *Journal of Peace Research* 27:1 (1990) 26-28.

In the late 1970s, any trace of consensus that remained disappeared, as a host of new views emerged, often under the banner of what was called “post-revisionism,” but also neo-traditionalism, neo-revisionism, world system theory, and others. The end of the Cold War and the opening of the Soviet archives provided a great array of new insights, but also a battery of fresh disagreements. If there is any consensus today, it can be said to be a cautious one, which avoids any one-dimensional explanations, and emphasizes the multiplicity of causes behind the Cold War, along with the complexity of the issue and the many interpretations that are possible. The works below represent the most up to date knowledge on the subject. Nevertheless, the lack of consensus prevalent today is readily apparent, because each of them explains the Cold War from a different perspective.²³

John Lewis Gaddis's 1982 study of U.S. foreign and security policies after the Second World War is the oldest work discussed here. There is a second edition, which was published more recently (only a few years ago), but in it the author has not revised the chapters on the early Cold War, instead adding in a new chapter dealing with the last decade of the Cold War. The first edition is thus still up to date when it comes to the history of the early Cold War.

Gaddis's focus is on domestic American politics, along with the policy-making process within the federal government. His work is thus a history of containment, and represents post-revisionist views on the Cold War: not the Soviet threat or U.S. expansionism was crucial, but domestic American politics. Containment was the main strategy formulated at the highest levels by the U.S. government in the early Cold War. It was a U.S. commitment to deploy its resources in order to stop Soviet expansion, so that the postwar status quo could be maintained. Gaddis explains that this meant preventing any communist takeovers of governments in areas that were vital to American national interests, based on the assumption that communist parties in most countries were loyal to the Kremlin, and followed its orders.²⁴

The author has periodized his work by marking the beginning of superpower detente in the 1970s as the end of his period (because it was the end of the “containment era”). His chapters are divided according to shifts that Gaddis detects in the nature and outlook of the containment policy implemented by successive U.S. governments. Because *Strategies of Containment* looks into the evolution of American foreign policy over a longer period (1945 – 1970s) than the presidency of Harry S. Truman, the most relevant chapters are those about the formulation of the strategy of containment in

²³ Melvyn P. Leffler, 'The Cold War: What do “We Now Know”?', *The American Historical Review* 104:2 (1999) 501-503.

²⁴ Gaddis, *Strategies of containment*, 21-22.

the 1940s, and its implementation during the Truman administration. It is worth noting that Gaddis considers containment as *formulated*, and containment as *implemented*, two different concepts. The latter allowed the instruments of containment (such as military alliances) to overshadow its end goals (modifying Soviet policy and achieving détente), according to the author. In summary, Gaddis shows how the containment policy was conceived of, and then implemented. He even briefly mentions the parallel between geopolitics and containment. It is made in passing, however, and he therefore leaves much room for a more extensive study of the geopolitical aspects of containment.²⁵

A different view of the early Cold War is shown in the famous article by Geir Lundestad (1986). Lundestad writes about the transatlantic expansion of the United States in the years following the Second World War. The Norwegian scholar is another author of the post-revisionist school, because he argues that the establishment of an American hegemony in Western Europe was not the sole product of American expansionism, as had been the revisionist consensus. Instead, European governments had actively courted American involvement in their nations and their continent, in order to benefit from the vast resources at the U.S.'s disposal, and acquire a counterweight against the great Russian garrisons to the east. Lundestad calls this “empire by invitation”: an unsure and at times unwilling United States was consistently pressured by Western European governments to maintain its presence in Europe and not to return to the isolationist tendencies it had embraced following the First World War.²⁶

Lundestad's article shows a different side to the history of the early Cold War, one that goes beyond just American perceptions and actions. The author also emphasizes the central importance of Western Europe to American policy-makers, which provides clarity as to where Washington's priorities lay. He also provides a closer insight into the implementation of containment strategy in Europe than does Gaddis, who is mainly concerned with the happenings in the American capital. In other words, it contributes to a better understanding of the situation in Western Europe.

Another relevant work is Paul Kennedy's famous 1988 book about the cycles of international hegemony. This is first of all because it is an authoritative piece of scholarship which also deals with the early Cold War. This makes it useful as a work of reference. Beyond simply this, however, and despite the fact that Kennedy puts economic and military power (as opposed to geography) at the center of his analysis, it has some parallels with the thinking of the Anglo-Saxon school of geopolitics. First and foremost, this is because concentrations of productivity and manpower are as central to geopolitical

²⁵ Ibid., 79.

²⁶ Geir Lundestad, 'Empire by invitation? The United States and Western Europe, 1945-1952', *Journal of Peace Research* 23:3 (1986) 263-264.

theories as topographical features like rivers and mountains. Kennedy, then, was not the first to put forth the idea that relative economic power matters. Second, Kennedy's terminology and thinking betray a certain geopolitical thinking that is remarkably similar to that of Mackinder. His concept of the "coming of a bipolar world" and the "crisis of the middle powers" (by which he meant Europe) echo the great British geographer's concepts of the Heartland and the Midland Ocean, and the weakness of the Inner Crescent or Rimland located in between both. It is for this reason that *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* thus represents an interesting and useful contribution to the present debate.²⁷

That there is much debate about the origins of the Cold War is illustrated by the two articles by Melvyn P. Leffler included in the literature. In his 1999 article, written (as the title suggests) in response to a 1997 book by Gaddis (and also, as becomes apparent while reading, in response to Gaddis's 1982 book discussed above) in addition to Lundestad's concept of "empire by invitation," Leffler argues that the U.S. role in the early Cold War was not so reactive as Gaddis and Lundestad claim it was. This is a view he repeats in his later article. Leffler argues that the postwar expansion of American power was less benign than Lundestad claimed, and that the Soviet Union was less to blame for the onset of the Cold War than Gaddis argues. This is not to say that Leffler represents a throwback to the revisionist consensus, in which the U.S. was to blame for the conflict: Leffler himself states he is a post-revisionist, and he does acknowledge that the coming of American hegemony was friendlier and more reactive than revisionists were willing to admit. Still, he attributes more blame for the beginning of the conflict to the Washington than do either Gaddis or Lundestad. He thus takes an intermediate position, in between classic revisionism and post-revisionism.²⁸

Leffler refocuses the attention on the actions and perceptions of American policymakers, away from Lundestad's preoccupation with Europe. He does this again in a 2005 article published in a volume he helped edit, *Origins of the Cold War*. In it, he contends that the U.S.'s conception of its national interests, which included (among others) a network of overseas bases, transit rights, naval domination, access to Eurasian markets, and denial of Eurasian resources to any rival, is of crucial importance to understanding the beginning of the Cold War. As can be gleaned from the list of things the Truman administration thought it needed in order to protect U.S. interests and U.S. security, The U.S. government had a geostrategic understanding that is similar to the ideas of both Mackinder and Spykman. However, this is merely implied in Leffler's narrative. At no point does the author seriously

²⁷ Paul Kennedy, *The rise and fall of the Great Powers* (London 1988) xix-xxiii.

²⁸ Leffler, 'What do "We Now Know"?', 521-522.

engage with the apparent similarities. He does in fact discuss the subject in his article, but this is relegated to an end note and is only a brief review of less than ten sources.²⁹

This begs the question of what exactly a geopolitical perspective is. So far, the field of geopolitics has only briefly been discussed. It represents a body of theory that may not be familiar to every reader. Before influence of geopolitics on the Truman administration's Cold War policy can be understood, it is therefore first necessary to look at the intellectual history of geopolitics.

²⁹ Melvyn P. Leffler, 'National security & US foreign policy', in Leffler, Melvyn P., & David S. Painter (eds.), *Origins of the Cold War* (New York & Milton Park 2005) 31-32.

2. What Is Geopolitics?

As a term, geopolitics can be used in multiple and sometimes confusing ways. It is often used in popular news media and other non-specialist sources as a sort of shorthand for international affairs, or for the power politics between nations. According to a popular explanation, for instance, Iraq was invaded by the United States in 2003 because of a “geopolitical” interest the superpower had in the country's oil resources.³⁰ However, this common idea of geopolitics is overly simple and too vague to be useful in a scientific context, for example because it reduces the term to no more than a synonym (of economics, in this case); more importantly, using the word geopolitics in this manner does not conform to the way it was used by the theorists that originally created and elaborated on the term. By contrast, the specialist definition of geopolitics is both more limited as well as less vague, being embedded in theory instead of semantics. Returning to the example of Iraq: explaining the invasion of that country as an attempt to gain control over its oil reserves is not, strictly put, an example of geopolitical analysis at all. There is admittedly an element of strict geopolitics present (because the presence of oil is, ultimately, a geographical fact with potential political implications); but this analysis is not theoretical in its articulation. In other words, inserting elements of geography into an explanation of international politics is not enough. Geography must be embedded into a systematic theory of the international environment if one is to speak of a specialist or theoretical geopolitics. The latter definition of the term is the one that is relevant to the containment policy of the Truman administration.

Geopolitics is a theory of international relations. Its central element, which distinguishes it from other theories, is its concentration on the role geography plays in the international environment. Theories of geopolitics are global in nature; however, their focus is not merely world politics, but the way in which international relations are affected by the globe's features as a whole. The premise is that contemporary and future events can be explained and predicted by putting the geographies of the states that make up the international system at the center of analysis. Moreover, geopolitics is a subfield of the more widely known realist theory of international relations. Like realism, its focus is on the relative power of nations. The difference lies in the fact that geopolitics goes beyond that, and makes the space in which states exercise power the main element of its analysis. Geopoliticians hold that this playing

³⁰ This “oil theory” can be found in such recent books as Greg Muttitt, *Fuel on the fire: Oil and politics in occupied Iraq* (London 2011) or William R. Clark, *Petrodollar warfare: Oil, Iraq, and the future of the dollar* (Vancouver 2004). The latter in fact attempts a geostrategic analysis.

field of international politics is not level; this in turn has its effect on the way international relations are conducted. An important substratum of geopolitics is geostrategy, which attempts to deduce strategic problems and solutions (as well as advice for policy makers) from geographic features.

Defining geopolitics leads to several questions. What is its history? What constitutes a theory of geopolitics? Which theories of geopolitics are important? To answer these questions, it is first necessary to look at the origin of geopolitics as a separate field of study. Following this it is important to understand which theories were most important in the interwar period. This being the era immediately preceding the Cold War, it is reasonable to assume that the most important theories formulated then would have the most possible influence on containment. This also means finding out which geopolitical theories were most influential in the United States in this period. This does by no means produce a complete history of geopolitics, even in brief form. There were many more authors and theories than those relevant to American containment policy. It is in the interests of clarity, however, to limit the narrative to those scholars and theories which had the most lasting impact, and which are most relevant to containment.

The prehistory of geopolitics

The origin of geopolitical study lies in the late nineteenth century, the era of the second Industrial Revolution and the new imperialism. At the same time as Europeans were gaining control over the vast majority of the Earth's surface, new technologies and techniques enabled them to map its features. The international community had crystallized under the aegis of the all-powerful, industrialized West, with most of the world divided into colonizers and colonized. The handful of non-Western states that remained independent (though subordinate), such as Japan, Persia, and Thailand, had been forced to conform to the Western concept of an international society of states. As one of the most important early geopoliticians, Halford Mackinder (1861 – 1947), said of this era, the world had become for the first time “a closed political system.” In other words, only now that it had become a single political environment was it possible to form a systematic view on what made global politics work. The explanation, in this case, was sought in the Earth's geography.³¹

This development did not occur out of thin air, however. An interesting view, espoused by the British historian Jeremy Black, holds that geopolitics has roots that stretch back all the way to Antiquity (he begins his history with the Roman empire). He calls this “geopolitics before the term.” In

³¹ H. J. Mackinder, 'The geographical pivot of history', *The Geographical Journal* 23:4 (1904) 421. Black, *Geopolitics*, 79.

Black's view, geopolitics were implicit in spatial concepts (such as the word “frontier”), as well as representations (such as maps) long before the word was coined and the field of study created. Black in effect argues that any spatial dimension of a polity (or political event) whatsoever is an example of “geopolitics before the term.” This is, of course, a conclusion which is hard to defend in its entirety: it was only just established that simply entering elements of geography into an analysis of politics is not enough to make that analysis geopolitical. Still, Black does shine a compelling light on the easily forgotten fact that there has often been a political background to geography, or vice versa.³²

Black states religions were accompanied by spatial conceptualizations which can be called geopolitical. There existed, for instance, a spatial idea of Christianity as a specific area (Christendom), conforming to the European continent, and limited to the south and southeast by the sea and Islam, and to the east by the steppe and its nomadic inhabitants. Islam, too, had such an implicitly geopolitical division of the world, in the concept of a *dar al-Islam* (house of Islam) juxtaposed with a *dar al-harb* (house of war). Tying religious boundaries to geographical ones is a good example of geopolitics *avant la lettre*, Black argues.³³

Another example of “geopolitics before the term” that Black cites is cartography. The drawing up of maps, together with the accompanying practice of land surveys and exploration, had strong political implications. Imperial governors and their superiors wanted to know what exactly the empire controlled, and, more importantly, where its boundaries were (a major issue in the colonial wars of North America). Armies needed to know where to march, how to march, and what to bring (e.g. artillery trains, which presented a large logistical problem). Perhaps even more basically, mapmakers were often sponsored by governments of the pre-modern era, with a specific task in mind (such as the creation of a route map, to be used by armies on the move; such a map was used to great effect by the French to achieve victory in the Yorktown campaign of the American Revolutionary War). In addition, as the news media and the popular press spread, maps became increasingly important conveyors of political information (which Black calls the rise of “carto-literacy”), such as the situation in the rebellious colonies for newspaper readers during the American War of Independence.³⁴

Black brings together these different strands of his argument in a chapter on what he calls the “geopolitics of British power” in the pre-modern period. Here, for example, he argues that the massive distances and expansive geography of the British empire in North America helped cause the American

³² Black, *Geopolitics*, 21.

³³ Black, *Geopolitics*, 21-26. *Ibid.*, 37-40.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 44-60.

Revolution, a geopolitical argument projected on a time before geopolitics. Despite this anachronism, Black also essentially describes the prehistory of geopolitics, with the expansion of Western empires and Western science as the two great processes that would give birth to a geopolitics after the term, instead of before. It was only once the West had taken over most of the world, and had mapped and surveyed its land masses and oceans, that it became possible to theorize about the international environment as a closed system. That is the moment in which geopolitics came into being.³⁵

Geopolitics from political geography

Before it became a separate discipline, geopolitics started out as a development of the field of political geography. This subfield of the greater discipline of geography was the product of applying the techniques that had proven so successful in the natural sciences throughout the nineteenth century to the field of (international) politics. In this respect it was quite similar to other contemporary attempts to realize the successes of the natural sciences in the social sciences, such as the historical materialism of Karl Marx or (then wildly popular) the theories of social Darwinism. In fact, the latter school of thought, which held that humans and human societies competed for survival just like animals in the wild, had a major impact on the thinking of Friedrich Ratzel (1844 – 1904), whom Parker calls “the father of political geography.” Ratzel, fond of Darwinian metaphors, thought the state was quite similar to an organism, with a head (the government), a body (its geography), a natural process of growth (through territorial expansion), and the need to survive among others of its kind. A state's natural features gave it a particular character, exactly as in the natural world. Since the natural features of a territory were the domain of geography, this is where the latter field was first connected to political study.³⁶

Ratzel's biology-infused ideas on political geography were a major influence on the man who originally coined the term “geopolitics,” the Swedish political scientist Rudolf Kjellén (1846 – 1922). Kjellén subscribed to the same biological conceptualization of the state. Like Ratzel, he conceived of a state's development in organic terms (every state, like every organism, knew growth and decline), and of the international environment as a survival of the fittest, where the strong devoured the weak.³⁷

Though Kjellén created the word, his thought was not geopolitical in the strict sense of the word. His work can more accurately be located in political geography, as can Ratzel's. This is because

³⁵ Black, *Geopolitics*, 80-106.

³⁶ Parker, *Western geopolitical thought*, 11-12. Black, *Geopolitics*, 107-110.

³⁷ Parker, *Western geopolitical thought*, 55-56.

both scholars were more concerned with explaining the development and characteristics of individual states than they were with doing the same for the international community as a whole. Only once the latter was attempted did geopolitics emerge as a mature, separate field of study. This is why the crystallization of the world political environment at the end of the nineteenth century was such an important event in the history of geopolitics, because only when the European system of states had expanded to include the vast majority of the globe was it possible to think in terms of a single global system. According to Parker, it was largely thanks to the efforts of Halford Mackinder that geopolitics emerged as a separate discipline, distinct from political geography. Mackinder's idea that there was a “geographical pivot of history,” published in 1904, Parker argues, is the very first truly geopolitical theory, where the unit of analysis was not the individual state but the entire international system.³⁸

This is an oversimplification, however. Though Mackinder certainly was important for creating a systematic theory based on a great deal of geographic knowledge, he was not the first to attempt to explain the global and historical political situation from a geographical point of view. He was preceded fourteen years earlier, in 1890, by the American admiral Alfred Thayer Mahan (1840 – 1914), who theorized that access to and domination over the world seas had been the mainspring of global power throughout the preceding five hundred years. In essence, Mackinder, who insisted that in the near future land power would come to dominate the Earth, was replying to Mahan in 1904. Mahan, who as mentioned achieved high rank in the U.S. Navy, exerted great influence on American policy-making circles with his theory. For instance, his book, *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History*, influenced the U.S. Congress, and later President Theodore Roosevelt, to embark on a large naval expansion program, and to deploy the navy to demonstrate U.S. power to the world. Mahan's was also a major influence on Wilhelm II, the German Kaiser, and helped convince him to launch a naval arms race against Great Britain. This was the objective, for example, of Roosevelt's so-called Great White Fleet, a world tour of the U.S. Navy's new battleships which lasted from 1907 to 1909.³⁹

Mahan was the first author to analyze the global political situation from a spatial viewpoint in a systematic way. He published his major work before both Ratzel (whose *Politische Geografie* dates from 1897) as well as Kjellén. The latter two political geographers also concentrated far more on the influence of geography on the individual state, rather than its influence on the system of states as a whole. Nevertheless there is something to say for the argument that Mackinder is the “father of modern

³⁸ Parker, *Western geopolitical thought*, 15-16.

³⁹ Kennedy, *Rise and fall*, 461.

geopolitics.”⁴⁰

There are several reasons for taking this honorific, attributed to the British geographer by Parker, seriously. First, while it is certainly true that Mahan was the first to systematically analyze the influence of a particular geographic feature (the seas) on international relations, Mackinder deepened and broadened this analytical framework by including a far larger amount of geographical data than his American predecessor. Mackinder's theory was based on features of geography ranging from topography to distance and population densities, which is far more than Mahan's limited focus on the oceans. Second, Mackinder was able to benefit from the intellectual pioneering done by authors such as Ratzel or Kjellén (and indeed Mahan, too), which had produced a new geopolitical methodology and a specific literature, and which he used in novel and effective ways. Put differently, Mackinder took the study of geopolitics, which had been embryonic, and made it mature. Thirdly and finally, Mackinder completed the geographic point of view of contemporary authors by tying it to history and technology. His view was that geographic influences on international relations changed over time (as with the imminent shift from sea power to land power that he proposed in 1904), and that this occurred due to advances in technology (such as railways, which opened up the interiors of continents). This was an innovation from Mahan's static navalism, where sea power had a constant effect on international politics. Simply put, Mackinder took the work of the political geographers and tied it to Mahan's global vantage point. These three features of Mackinder's theory made it better supported, more systematic, and analytically more useful than Mahan's, and gave it a considerably broader scope than the work of the political geographers.⁴¹

Mackinder's theory is relatively simple. It is based on the assumption that there is a conflict between sea-based power and land-based power. It was a reply to Mahan's insistence on sea power: Mackinder argued that, in the near future, land power would be more important. His theory became known as the Heartland Theory, because the most important geopolitical area was called the Heartland (initially, the “geographical pivot of history”), a vast area covering the northern interior of Eurasia. Adjacent to the Heartland were the most densely populated and economically productive areas in the world (the Inner Crescent). Whoever controlled the Heartland could dominate the Inner Crescent, and from there, the world. The sea powers (who occupied a third area, the Outer Crescent) would be unable to stop the Heartland power at that point. This was a threat that needed to be contained. As may be

⁴⁰ Parker, *Western geopolitical thought*, 20-31. Black, *Geopolitics*, 108.

⁴¹ Black, *Geopolitics*, 109-112. Sloan, *Geopolitics*, 7-8. Østerud, 'Uses and abuses', 194.

obvious, the Heartland power for the entirety of the twentieth century was Russia, though Mackinder also thought it was possible that Germany could become the Heartland power through military conquest (as attempted in the Second World War). Mackinder's 1904 thesis seemed to acquire striking relevance when, immediately after World War Two, the Soviet Union had occupied large areas immediately adjacent to it, such as central and eastern Europe. This was all the more so because he had identified both of its major early Cold War rivals, Britain and the United States, as the sea powers of the Outer Crescent. It seemed as if Mackinder had been right all along.⁴²

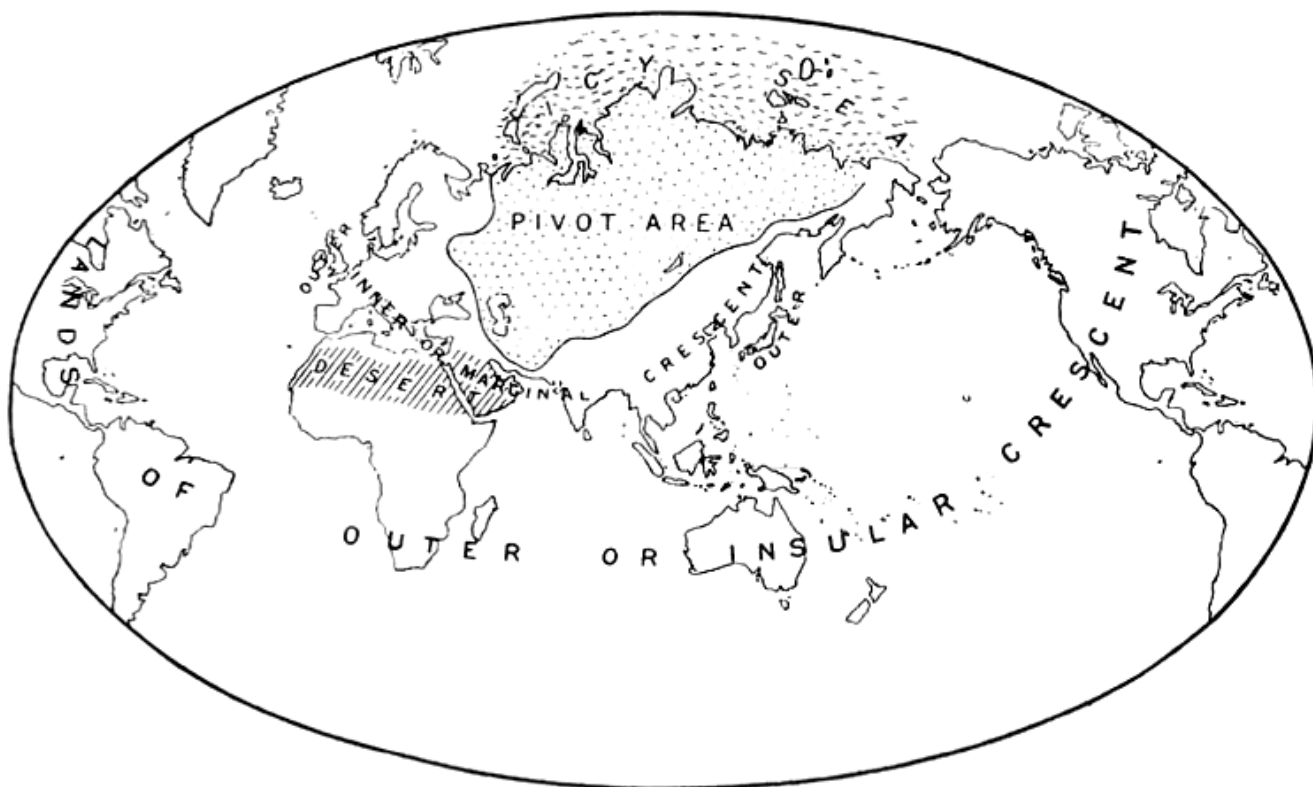


Figure 2.1: Mackinder's Heartland Theory

Source: Mackinder, 'The geographic pivot of history', 435.

Theory in practice: German *Geopolitik*

When it comes to the influence geopolitical thought had on government policy, an interesting case

⁴² Østerud, 'Uses and abuses', 192. Ibid., 193-195. Ibid., 196.

study is that of German geopolitics in the interwar period. This was a major school of geopolitics in that period, which became infamous for its eventual association with Hitler's Nazi regime. However, it provides an interesting example in which geopolitics became intertwined with policy, often in misleading ways.

Mackinder's thought had a major impact in Germany. German geopolitics arose at the University of Munich. It rose to prominence during the 1920s, and ended up developing close ties to the National Socialist regime in the next decade, after the latter's establishment in 1933. *Geopolitik* was strongly influenced by Germany's situation following the end of the First World War, which had seen it defeated and stripped of large amounts of its prewar territory. The central figure in the German geopolitics of the interwar period was Karl Haushofer (1869 – 1946), who was a great admirer of Mackinder and called the latter's 1904 article a “geopolitical masterpiece.” Haushofer had been a general during the First World War, and had also been an admirer of the theories of his American colleague Mahan. He would remain the dean of the Munich school of geopolitics until the end of the Nazi regime, which also saw the downfall of the school. Rudolf Hess was one of his protégés.⁴³

German geopolitics represented an attempt to rationalize Germany's situation in Europe and the world, to use the benefits of science in order to understand the *conditio Germaniae*. As such, it was a development of the ideas of Ratzel and Kjellén, only now influenced by the work of Mackinder (and also Mahan). The central terms in German geopolitical theory included *Lebensraum* (originally coined by Ratzel) and *Mitteleuropa* (Middle Europe, an area encompassing Central and Eastern Europe which, it was argued, conformed to Germany's “natural” frontiers, and which as a result had to be dominated by German power). Much more than the Anglo-Saxon geopoliticians Mahan and Mackinder, Haushofer and his colleagues were captivated by the idea of the state as an organism, first promoted by Ratzel. As a result, they adopted his concept of the international environment as a hostile place in which states competed for limited resources in order to survive; in short, the application of social Darwinist ideas to international politics. Small states were defined as weak, and were destined to be absorbed by larger, that is stronger ones. German geopolitics was also much more deterministic than either Mackinder, Ratzel or Kjellén: geography was not just an influence on a state's internal makeup and international position, but the primary determinant. Haushofer *et al* thought that a nation's geography determined its character: it had made some peoples (Germany, of course) conquerors, and others the conquered. The same determinism showed itself in their belief that states would expand inexorably to encompass

⁴³ Parker, *Western geopolitical thought*, 53-55. *Ibid.*, 57-58.

borders that made “geographical sense.” They would then form complete geographical units which could achieve autarky (complete economic self-reliance). It goes without saying that this conformed to the Nazi goal of making Germany autarkic.⁴⁴

From these theoretical foundations, German geopolitics formulated many policy recommendations. Next to autarky, another was the creation of a German-led *Mitteleuropa*, which followed naturally from the demand for autarky, because controlling this Central and Eastern European territory would enable full economic self-reliance. Of course, this also meant abandoning the Treaty of Versailles and totally revising the borders it had created: these were unnatural, a “mutilation of our national soil,” as Haushofer put it. A *Drang nach Osten* was in order. Citing Mackinder's view that land power opposed sea power the Munich school argued that the greatest threat to Germany was the British empire, which threatened to encircle it (France and its Eastern European *cordon sanitaire* was a corollary to this development).⁴⁵

The school of German *Geopolitik* became an important tool for Nazi propaganda after 1933. Nevertheless, the policy recommendations of Haushofer and his Munich school should not be mistaken for a mere geopolitical rationalization of Nazi international aims. It was, first of all, not a product of Hitler's regime: Haushofer *et al* had already risen to prominence in the late 1920s. Furthermore, though elements of racist thought could be found in the work of German geopoliticians, geography was far more important. Haushofer advocated “symbiosis” with the peoples of *Mitteleuropa*, not conquest and rule by an aristocracy of racially superior Aryans. In fact, one of Haushofer's most fervent aims was to realize the power of the Heartland that Mackinder had dreaded, but the way in which he wished to do so was entirely contrary to that of the Nazi leadership: alliance with the Soviet Union (and Japan). This unassailable citadel “from the Elbe to the Amur” was the German geopolitician's most fervent dream. It seemed to come true when the Tripartite Pact, and later the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, were signed. However, once Hitler came into power, the Munich school too was subjected to *Gleichschaltung* like the rest of German society, and it became less an independent academic bastion and more a propaganda outlet. The war with the British “anaconda” was given subordinate status, and the Soviet Union was attacked in 1941. So, unlike the propaganda claims of the Allies, Nazi foreign policy was not systematically informed by German geopolitics, let alone that Karl Haushofer was the secret mastermind behind German aggression. Nevertheless, his ideas of *Lebensraum* (a modified form of

⁴⁴ Parker, *Western geopolitical thought*, 58-63.

⁴⁵ Sloan, *Geopolitics*, 29-33. Parker, *Western geopolitical thought*, 64-67. Black, *Geopolitics*, 128-134.

Ratzel's idea) and *Drang nach Osten* remain some of Nazi Germany's most well-known goals to this day.⁴⁶

After the war: Geopolitics & the new superpower

The close ties of the Munich school with the Nazi regime threatened to discredit the study of geopolitics in the immediate postwar period. Already in November 1939, *Life Magazine* lambasted Haushofer as the “philosopher of Nazism” and the “inexhaustible Ideas Man for Hitler” in one of its articles. This was repeated in several American propaganda movies, such as *Plan for Destruction* in 1943. Much like the Roman salute or the swastika had been, the study of geopolitics was in danger of being irreparably damaged by its association with Hitler's Germany.⁴⁷

However, the Allies, and the Anglo-Saxon powers in particular, had a geopolitical tradition of their own that was as old, if not older, than its German counterpart. There were important links between geopoliticians in the Anglo-Saxon world and policy-makers as well. Mahan, an admiral, had had a formative influence on the buildup of the U.S. Navy at the turn of the twentieth century. Mackinder had been a member of parliament in the United Kingdom, and had also been appointed British High Commissioner for Russia during the civil war there. Meanwhile, American President Woodrow Wilson had been advised at the Paris Peace Conference by the American geographer and geopolitician Isaiah Bowman (1878 – 1950), who again fulfilled that role after the Second World War. In addition, he founded and chaired the Council on Foreign Relations, an influential foreign policy think tank in Washington, DC. Mackinder revised his theory a third and final time in 1943, calling for cooperation with the Soviet Union (the Heartland power) in order to prevent Nazi German domination of the Heartland, effectively distancing himself from his colleague Haushofer. In this way he also demonstrated the striking fluidity of his theory, which seemingly could change according to political circumstances.⁴⁸

Geopolitical thought, then, was well-embedded in the political elite of the Anglo-Saxon world. It was anything but limited to these circles, however: there was such a thing as “barbershop geopolitics” in the interwar United States, indicating that the subject was of interest not just to policy-makers, but to ordinary citizens as well (an interesting geopolitical parallel to Black's pre-modern “carto-literacy”). Together, this meant that Anglo-Saxon geopolitics had a solid base upon which to rest

⁴⁶ Parker, *Western geopolitical thought*, 68-84. Sloan, *Geopolitics*, 35-43.

⁴⁷ Black, *Geopolitics*, 134-135.

⁴⁸ Smith, *American empire*, 25-28. Sloan, *Geopolitics*, 60-61.

despite the association of its German counterpart. What is more, the dramatic expansion of Soviet power beyond its prewar boundaries, which found Soviet troops occupying huge tracts of Central and Eastern Europe, East Asia (Manchuria and North Korea), and the Middle East (Iran), gave the theories of the classical Anglo-Saxon geopoliticians renewed currency. Some present-day scholars of geopolitics, in fact, speak of a “postwar revival” of classical geopolitics.⁴⁹

Furthermore, while Allied propaganda fulminated against *Geopolitik*, the Second World War saw further development of geopolitical theories in the United States. Important in this was the work of Nicholas J. Spykman (1893 – 1943), an American political scientist who took an intermediate position in between Mahan and Mackinder. While adopting Mackinder's geographical categorization of Heartland, Inner Crescent, and Outer Crescent, he argued that it is the second region (which he called the “Rimland”) that is geopolitically the most important. This was because that is where the world's foremost concentrations of population and productivity were (and are) located. The powers of the Rimland, Spykman maintained, have historically been the most dominant. Consequently, the Rimland has always striven to expand and gain control over both the Heartland as well as the Outer Crescent. This meant that Spykman rejected Mackinder's assumption that land power is always in conflict with sea power: according to him, the situation had always been more complicated. He was adamant that it was in the interests of the U.S. not to let any other power dominate the Rimland. Spykman regarded the Soviet Union as being most capable of accomplishing that feat; thus it was the greatest possible danger to American interests. If cooperation with the Soviets could not be maintained after the war, the only alternative was to put a halt to their expansion.⁵⁰

Spykman is important, because his ideas bear a striking resemblance to later U.S. policy during the opening stages of the Cold War. Parker speaks of a “Spykman-Kennan thesis of containment,” because of the strong parallels of the policy recommendations that Spykman made to the containment strategy formulated by George F. Kennan (1904 – 2005). The same can be said about Mackinder's theory, since he also argues that an expansionist Heartland needs to be contained. This Heartland, controlled first by Imperial Russia, then the Soviet Union, was a threat, which was expanding in all directions (the Inner Crescent). It needed to be contained, in order to prevent the Soviets from gaining control over most of the world's manpower and productive resources, and protect the interests of the

⁴⁹ Parker, *Western geopolitical thought*, 102. Black, *Geopolitics*, 76. Kennedy, *Rise and fall*, 469-470. An example of “barbershop geopolitics” can be found in the Truman Office Files (hereafter: TOF), Correspondence File (hereafter: CF), Reel 13 0037-0052, Advertisement for Louis J. Alber, ca. December 1952.

⁵⁰ Parker, *Western geopolitical thought*, 133-138.

United States (the “sea power”). Spykman and Mackinder, together with Mahan, are the most influential classical geopoliticians of the Anglo-Saxon world. This means that if geopolitical theories actually did influence U.S. containment strategy, then it is likely the theories of these three geopolitical thinkers that had the greatest influence.⁵¹

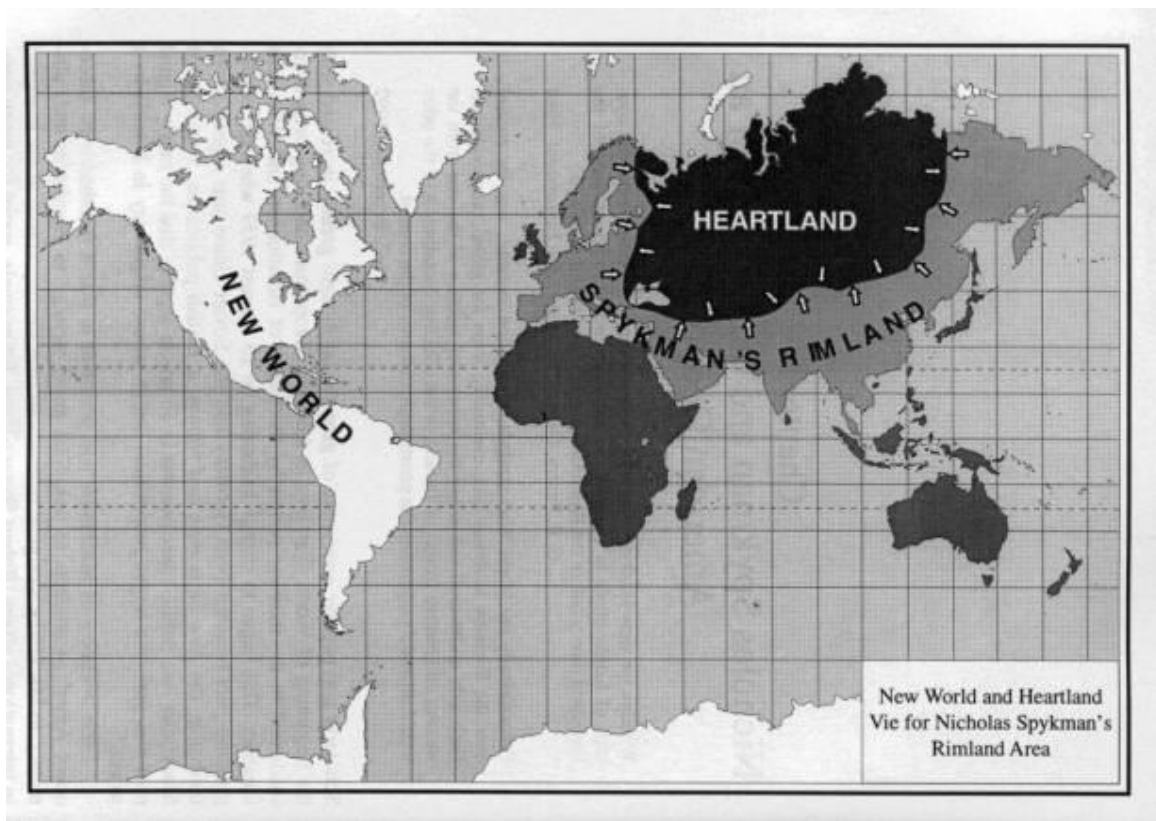


Figure 2.2: Spykman's Rimland Theory

Source: Mark Polelle, *Raising cartographic consciousness: The social and foreign policy vision of geopolitics in the twentieth century* (New York 1999) 118.

Conclusions

Geopolitics is a field of study that needs to be distinguished from the popular idea of geopolitics. It has a long history, with precedents going back to Antiquity. As a separate field of study, however, its origins lie firmly in the *fin de siècle* period of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Part of

⁵¹ Parker, *Western geopolitical thought*, 141.

the same intellectual tradition in which the successful techniques of the natural sciences were applied to the social, geopolitics is the study of the effect geography has on international politics. As a subset of the realist theory of international relations, it focuses not just on the possession of power alone, but on the space in which this power is exercised. Its spatial point of view on international relations is therefore crucial.

The intellectual history of geopolitics is long and varied. Originally, it was a development of political geography, which focused mainly on the influence of geography on individual states. Geopolitics matured into its own discipline by the turn of the twentieth century, in large part due to the efforts of the British geographer Halford Mackinder. His thinking gained particular currency in Germany, where a distinct school of geopolitics developed under the aegis of Karl Haushofer. Its close links to the Nazi regime in that country meant that this school came to an abrupt end when the Second World War was lost. This had the additional effect of tainting the study of geopolitics with an association with Nazism, largely due to the efforts of Allied propaganda.

Nevertheless, this did not stop geopolitical thought from remaining important in the Allied countries following the war. The Anglo-Saxon countries, particularly the U.S. (which is of central importance in this thesis), had their own geopolitical tradition separate from the German, and all major geopoliticians in the Allied nations distanced themselves from their counterparts in Germany. The continuing relevance of Anglo-Saxon geopolitics is exemplified by the striking and important parallels found between it and the containment policy followed by the U.S. in the early Cold War.

3. The Early Cold War

In the spring of 1945, it was clear that the Second World War was drawing to a close. Allied armies had crossed the prewar frontiers of Germany and were closing in on Berlin itself. In the Pacific, the Americans had dislodged the Japanese from their island fortress of Iwo Jima and were busy conquering Okinawa, while simultaneously preparing for X-Day, a massive invasion of the Japanese home islands (it was eventually called off in favor of the nuclear attacks of Hiroshima and Nagasaki). The Soviets were massing forces in the Far East for a lightning campaign against the Japanese in Manchuria. The Axis Powers were on their last legs, and it was apparent to all major players that it would only be a matter of months before the Allies would be victorious.

This raised the question of what the postwar world would look like. The Allied governments, of course, did not wait until early 1945 to consider this question. Already in 1941, with the signing of the Atlantic Charter, the United States and Great Britain had expressed values and objectives (such as national self-determination and free trade) that would play crucial roles in the foundation of the postwar world order. The question had again been addressed at the great wartime conferences of Allied leaders in Cairo, Tehran, and Yalta. They would do so again shortly before the end of the war, in Potsdam, nine weeks after Germany had unconditionally surrendered. The issue of the new world order that was to emerge from the ashes of World War II was clearly high on the agenda of Allied leaders.

It is both interesting as well as important to note that the primary issue at all of these conferences, and the declarations which they produced, was how to deal with the aggressor countries. Though obviously influenced by wartime considerations (the Soviet invasion of Manchuria, like the Western Allied invasion of Europe, had been promised at Tehran), the parts of the declarations that dealt with the postwar settlement were all reactions to the politics and strategy of the Axis powers. Put differently, nobody was openly considering a postwar world dominated by yet more conflict. According to the U.S., the most powerful of the Allies, the new world order to be founded following the victory over Germany and Japan was to be based on the three pillars of collective security (in the form of a United Nations Organization), free trade, and disarmament (principally of the aggressor nations). The objective was to prevent another war, caused by aggression similar to that of Nazi Germany or Japan, from occurring. This was to be achieved by the largest Allied powers together (later to be united in the UN Security Council).

The conflict that would ultimately occur between the capitalist and communist blocs, led by the

United States and the Soviet Union respectively, then, was on the mind of only a small few (Winston Churchill among them). It would be years before containment was formulated as a strategy. The vast majority of government leaders and policy-makers were focused on dealing with the defeated Axis powers and preventing the rise of any more aggressors like them, not with the sinister threats of a global communist takeover, or a capitalist-imperialist plot.

Yet the tracing of this radical change in the objectives of U.S. foreign policy in the immediate postwar years is central to this thesis. In this chapter, I will focus on the historical development (not the geopolitical aspects) of it, which will allow me to answer a question asked in the introduction: what was U.S. foreign policy in the early Cold War period? To this I can now add: how did it change over the years of the Truman administration? What were the major issues of U.S. foreign policy in this period? What, in short, caused it to change? Answering all of these questions will provide an excellent foundation from which to tackle the central issue of the influence of geopolitics on U.S. early Cold War policy.

This chapter will deal with the aforementioned issues in a chronological manner. As such, it will start with the policy toward the Soviets inherited by President Harry S. Truman from Franklin Roosevelt following the latter's death in 1945. It will continue until containment policy had become the established cornerstone of all U.S. policy by the time of the Korean War, when fears of advancing communism were at their height. In between, well-known events such as George F. Kennan's Long Telegram, the developing crises between the Americans and the Soviets, decolonization, and the apparent rise of communism in postwar Europe and Asia, will all be dealt with.

The inheritance of Harry S. Truman

When Franklin D. Roosevelt died in office in April 1945 and was succeeded by Vice-President Harry S. Truman, he left a foreign policy which was dominated by the circumstances and aftermath of World War II. Truman entered the office of chief executive of the United States with an agenda that differed little from that of his illustrious predecessor. The goal was still the imminent defeat of the Axis nations and to rework the postwar world order in order to prevent a recurrence of their actions, all in cooperation with all of the wartime Allies.⁵²

When it came to the soon-to-be crucial issue of Soviet-American relations, Roosevelt's overriding goal had been to preserve the wartime grand alliance beyond Hitler's defeat. He believed

⁵² Gaddis, *Strategies of containment*, 15.

that this was the way in which to achieve America's immediate goal of defeating the totalitarian forces of the Axis, without immediately losing what was won by seeing Europe come under the iron-fisted domination of Joseph Stalin's Soviet Union. Moscow, in other words, had to be incorporated into the new world order, and not left out of it, as it had been for most of the interwar period. To paraphrase John Lewis Gaddis, the objective was the containment of the Soviets through integration, not confrontation.⁵³

It was Roosevelt's aim to achieve this integration of the Soviet Union into the postwar order through the twin methods of acknowledging Soviet primacy in their sphere of influence, and by trying to win Stalin's trust. Thus, the cold realism of recognizing that the Soviets had their own special area of interest (Eastern Europe) was to be met by making them one of the world's "Four Policemen" (as he called them), who were to act against acts of aggression within their own designated regions or spheres. This made Roosevelt's policy markedly different, and much less radical, than the full-blown idealism of his predecessor in office Woodrow Wilson, who had found himself in a similar position of power to remake the world order, but had refused to compromise his ideology.⁵⁴

Roosevelt was not alone in his administration, of course, and there were those within it who disagreed with his strategy of incorporation. Resistance was based mainly in the State Department. Officials there argued that a different approach was needed, because the Soviet Union, under its notoriously suspicious (even paranoid) leader, was not open to attempts at gaining its trust through cordiality and good will. Unconditional aid (in the form of e.g. Lend-Lease) was unwise, because it would only serve to encourage Soviet expansionism and endanger American interests as a result. As the ambassador to the Soviet Union from 1943 to 1946, W. Averell Harriman, argued, there was a "price" to American "goodwill." What Washington needed to use, rather than friendliness and accommodation, was "a firm but friendly *quid pro quo* attitude." Wartime exigencies were not a reason to postpone such an approach until after the defeat of the Nazis.⁵⁵

Roosevelt was unwilling to resort to such a course of action while the war was raging. Defeating Germany and Japan came first, and the Soviets were needed for that effort; bargaining with sticks and carrots (as Gaddis puts it) could come later. Even then, his goal was to serve American interests by incorporating Moscow into a collective security arrangement, despite any differences that could exist between it and Washington. However, the U.S.'s longest-serving president died before the

⁵³ Gaddis, *Strategies of containment*, 6-11.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 10-13.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 14-15.

war's end, and his disagreeing advisers stepped into the vacuum he left behind. Their course of action was to be adopted by the United States in the first years of the Truman Presidency.⁵⁶

Sticks, carrots, & denazification: Truman's early years

Unbriefed about the intentions and activities of his enigmatic predecessor and his foreign policy, the new President Truman turned to his State Department experts to plot a course of action. These, understandably, replied by emphasizing their *quid quo pro* strategy at the expense of Roosevelt's containment by integration. Truman evidently did not detect the difference (which was understandable, considering Roosevelt's habit of not sharing his thoughts or opinion on important policy matters), and promptly alarmed the Soviets with his change of course while believing he was maintaining it.⁵⁷

The new, less open-handed approach adopted by the new administration did not mean that it abandoned Roosevelt's objective of maintaining the wartime grand alliance in peacetime. Truman rejected Churchill's suggestion that the Western Allies ought to deploy troops in such a way as to prevent the Russians from occupying too much of Germany. He also soon came to view the Soviet Union in a more pragmatic light: totalitarian and disagreeable though it may have been, deals were possible as long as Moscow held up its end of the bargain. Seen this way, as Gaddis points out, Truman viewed the Soviets as much like the party bosses that ran the political machines of his era at home: unpalatable to the democratic mind, perhaps, but quite useful.

Truman also continued to consult doves in the American political establishment, such as Henry Wallace or Joseph E. Davies. The latter, who had been ambassador in Moscow in the thirties under Roosevelt, advised Truman in 1945 to satisfy the Soviets with “some accommodations to secure what it considers vital.” One of these was the existence of friendly governments in countries bordering the Soviet Union. “If, in order to have friendly governments, they have to have communist governments, they will have it that way,” and that was fine, according to Davies. Confrontation would only lead to conflict, and besides, Davies had “every confidence” that they would meet the U.S. “more than half way.”⁵⁸

The sticks and carrots approach did not work as foreseen. The fact was that the Americans simply did not possess the necessary “sticks” or “carrots” to make such a strategy work. A “stick” such as the atomic bomb was unimpressive because the threat of using it would almost certainly not be

⁵⁶ Gaddis, *Strategies of containment*, 15-18.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁵⁸ TOF, CF, Reel 6 0149-0162, Davies to Truman, September 29, 1945.

backed up with action. Washington possessed few bombs in the first place, and little to no means with which to deliver them to targets within the vast area of the Soviet Union. A “carrot” such as economic aid or reparations did not work because Moscow simply relied too little on American aid to need it on a large scale, and be willing to make concessions in order to get it. Furthermore, the *quid quo pro* approach had become a political liability because the deals which were made as part of it were perceived, by a hostile Republican-controlled Congress, as appeasement of the Soviet Union. The result was a stalemate along with a deterioration of relations. Denunciations of U.S. actions by Soviet leaders increased toward early 1946, and the ample suspicions present in the Soviet leadership had only been fed further by the ineffective *quid quo pro* strategy.⁵⁹

It is worth noting the fact that the concern in Washington of what to do with the vanquished powers remained important far beyond May 1945. As late as April of 1947 there was still a debate going on in the White House about how to respond to a report on the economic situation of Germany by former President Herbert Hoover, who had been sent to Europe by Truman as part of the so-called President's Economic Mission to Germany and Austria. Hoover's conclusion was that Germany had to be allowed to reconstitute its industry, and that only in this way could Europe begin its economic recovery as a whole. This was not well-received in Washington: Hoover's report was strongly criticized by both the former U.S. ambassador to the Allied Reparations Committee, Edwin W. Pauley, and by the first White House Chief of Staff, John R. Steelman. Steelman charged that Hoover's proposals represented a “fundamental reversal” of U.S. policy toward Europe, and worried about the international implications of it. It would (he argued) break the commitments America made at Potsdam. Pauley reached similar conclusions, adding that it would restore a “German colossus” to a dominant position in Europe. It is salient to note that Russia is noted by both men to be a principal and deserving recipient of the reparations that Hoover argued had to be kept in Germany. Equally important is the fact that there is not a hint of anti-Soviet sentiment in the discussion: the only threat present is that of a resurgent Germany. Steelman put it this way: in Europe, given “the prevailing political and economic uncertainty, the most urgent need ... is to make some definite settlement of the reparations question.” Evidently, dealing with the old enemy was, in 1947 still at least as important as the emergence of a new one.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Gaddis, *Strategies of containment*, 17-18.

⁶⁰ TOF, CF, Reel 14 0473-0475, John R. Steelman, 'Memorandum for the President'. Ibid. 0477-0482, Pauley to Truman, April 15, 1947.

The big turn: George F. Kennan & containment

Nevertheless, and despite the continuing importance attributed to dealing with the defeated powers in Washington, by the beginning of 1946 American policy-makers were becoming increasingly concerned by Soviet actions. Moscow had moved to oppose the creation of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. With the *quid quo pro* strategy failing to move the Soviets to act differently in this regard, and Soviet hostility in fact increasing in the face of it, the time was ripe for a reorientation. Moreover, in Europe as much as in Asia, the devastation and chaos brought by the war and its aftermath continued. Communist parties were becoming increasingly popular in this power vacuum. Another factor in their rise was the sympathy they enjoyed among many Europeans and Asians for opposing Axis forces and collaborators in many countries formerly occupied by the Nazis. This raised fears in the White House that communist electoral victories would enable the Soviet Union to take over Europe, which the U.S. had fought so hard to prevent Nazi Germany from doing. The underlying assumption, of course, was that the communist parties of the world followed orders from the Kremlin.⁶¹

It was in this context that the State Department turned to its embassy in the Soviet Union for information on Soviet intentions. They asked the embassy's minister-counselor, George F. Kennan, aged around forty and one of the Department's first trained career diplomats, to explain at length why exactly the Soviet Union did what it did: that is, why it did not respond as expected to the *quid quo pro* strategy. Kennan, one of the U.S.'s leading experts on Russian affairs at the time, famously replied in an 8,000 word essay that has gone down in history as the Long Telegram.⁶²

Kennan's thesis was simple: the Soviet Union could not be moved to act differently through external action (whether through accommodation or through sticks and carrots). Here was a country that was fundamentally insecure in everything it did. It felt itself surrounded by external enemies on all sides. What was more, the image of being surrounded by hostile forces at each turn buttressed a brutal regime that was largely ignorant, and uncaring, of foreign affairs. In other words, the Kremlin's acts were anchored in domestic considerations (regime survival), which meant it could not be swayed or persuaded of changing course. Soviet suspicions could not be allayed. There was no point in attempting to integrate them into a new world order as a close partner, or trying to bargain with them on a frank and fair basis, because the Soviet leadership needed enemies and was in any case far too submerged in mistrust to view such moves as anything but sinister ploys. The only thing the U.S. and its Western

⁶¹ Leffler, 'National security & US foreign policy', 27.

⁶² Gaddis, *Strategies of containment*, 21. This was the telegram quoted in the introduction.

allies could do was to draw a line, as it were, and commit themselves to showing the Soviet Union (without provoking it) that they could not be taken lightly and that there would be no further communist advances. The watchword adopted for this strategy by Secretary of State James F. Byrnes was “patience and firmness.”⁶³

Kennan's telegram struck Washington like a bomb. It was widely read and praised and soon adopted as the cornerstone of a new U.S. policy toward Moscow. Byrnes, the one who coined the new watchword, had previously enthusiastically committed to *quid quo pro*. He now switched to employing resolute opposition to Soviet expansion on a wide range of issues, from successfully ending the Soviet occupation of a part of Iran, through the quiet rejection of Soviet aspirations in the Dardanelles and the Dodecanese, to backing up the beleaguered anti-communist government in Greece. The shift in U.S. policy was represented most evocatively in a famous speech by Truman to the Republican-controlled 80th Congress on March 12, 1947, in which the President established what came to be known as the Truman Doctrine. Prompted by Soviet pressure on Turkey (relating to the issue of sovereignty over the straits leading out of the Black Sea, a geographical feature of great economic importance to the Kremlin, and which Stalin wanted partial control over), Truman now dedicated the United States to supporting “free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures.” His message to Congress was phrased in opposition to all forms of totalitarianism (thus maintaining continuity with America's wartime aims), but it was clear from the rhetoric and the issues mentioned that the chief danger came from Moscow, not from anywhere else. This was the first time the President of the United States had openly declared himself in favor of what would become known as the containment strategy.⁶⁴

The Long Telegram had catapulted Kennan into the position of being recognized as the foremost Soviet expert in the American government. This eventually brought him under the attention of George C. Marshall, Byrnes's successor as Secretary of State, who had decided to create a “Policy Planning Staff” for the Department of State in order to give greater consistency to U.S. diplomacy. He evidently thought that Kennan was the perfect choice as the first director of this new body. It was in this function that Kennan developed the intellectual underpinnings of what then became known as containment strategy.⁶⁵

Kennan's view of containment was basically a realist approach to international relations. The

⁶³ Gaddis, *Strategies of containment*, 19-22. DHTP: 7, Doc. 9: Kennan to Department of State, February 22, 1946.

⁶⁴ Leffler, 'National security & US foreign policy', 26. Gaddis, *Strategies of containment*, 22-23.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 25.

international environment was inherently diverse, and international harmony was unrealistic: thus, he thought, the main pursuit of the U.S. should be security, which was served by a balance of power. The world according to Kennan was dominated by several centers of population and industry (the U.S., Europe, the Soviet Union, and East Asia). The domination of too many of these centers by any one power was a threat to American security (the overt geopolitical character of this analysis, and its close parallels to the thinking of, say, a Mackinder or a Spykman, is striking). This naturally fed into a preoccupation with the Soviet Union, the only power capable of achieving such a domination. The Soviet challenge took the form of the threat of communist takeovers in any number of countries in the areas of industrial and demographic importance. The central assumption made here by Kennan (and later the U.S. government), of course, was that communist parties around the world served the wishes of the Kremlin. Any communist takeover of a government was therefore interpreted as a takeover by the Soviet Union. The challenge to the balance of power (and therefore to U.S. interests) was thus chiefly a psychological one to Kennan. In the devastated economies and chaotic politics of postwar Europe and Asia, the drastic yet straightforward solutions offered by communist parties became attractive, he thought. Here lay the road to government takeovers, and thus to Soviet expansion.⁶⁶

The policy recommendations that flowed out from this analysis were therefore centered on immunizing, as it were, countries in areas vital to U.S. interests against communist takeovers. This was to be achieved in a threefold manner (in decreasing order of immediacy): by restoring the psychological will to resist in countries under threat of Soviet expansionism; by weakening Soviet domination of the communist bloc; and, eventually, by altering the Soviet idea of international relations (in effect, detente). The principal tool with which Kennan's Policy Planning Staff hoped to block Soviet expansion was economic aid. This would allow war-ravaged countries to restore prosperity, which would concurrently limit the attractiveness of communist ideas. Another instrument in the toolbox of containment was to further the rifts between Moscow and communist parties in the Soviet-led bloc, which he thought would appear inevitably. Last and perhaps least important in Kennan's conception of containment were military means: they were crucial for deterrence, but only a means to an end, which was to ultimately change Soviet behavior and incorporate it into the international community as a reformed member. War, moreover, was most certainly not an option. Economic aid came first, and military considerations could never overshadow the ends goal of achieving detente.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Robert Jervis, 'Was the Cold War a security dilemma?' *Journal of Cold War Studies* 3:1 (2001) 48. Gaddis, *Strategies of containment*, 27-36.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 36-51.

Domestic political considerations, coupled with the pressing needs of the international situation affecting the Truman administration of which he was a part, however, produced a rift between containment as intended (by the Policy Planning Staff under Kennan), and containment as implemented (to paraphrase Gaddis). The means began to overshadow the ends. Instead of using the tools of containment, particularly economic aid, to achieve the goal of actively ending the Cold War (no matter how long-term such a goal might have been), the White House came to focus almost solely on rebuilding a position of strength for itself and the Western bloc. The emphasis in doing so came to lie increasingly on a military buildup, which the European Recovery Plan was supposed to make possible. For the U.S. itself, achieving a position of strength took the shape of acquiring an extensive network of military bases commanding the most important sea lanes and stretching across a good deal of what Spykman defined as the “Rimland.” What was more, the judging of Soviet intentions, which had been so important in Kennan's thinking, was marginalized in favor of taxing Soviet capabilities. The reasoning was that the opaque nature of the Soviet regime made it easier to predict Soviet behavior according to the Soviet Union's capacities than according to its actual strategic concerns or objectives. This was especially the case for defense planners in the various military departments of the Truman administration. As such, the end goal of achieving detente with Moscow was lost out of sight.⁶⁸

Kennan's voice, meanwhile, grew increasingly isolated in the administration as this went on. This occurred despite (or perhaps because of) his admonishments and complaints about the mixing up of ends and means and thus wrongfully (because too open-ended) commitment to containment. His lamentation that the administration did not listen enough to career diplomats on the ground, with all their expertise, for instance, was firmly brushed aside by Truman's third Secretary of State Dean Acheson. Kennan eventually quit as chief of the Policy Planning Staff in 1949. The strategy he had been so instrumental in formulating had become a creature quite different from what he had originally envisioned.⁶⁹

Europe & Korea: Two external effects on U.S. early Cold War policy

So far, the overwhelming emphasis in this chapter has lain on the actions, strategies, and perceptions of the American government. It goes without saying that this is just one out of many aspects relating to the Cold War, though owing to the nature of this thesis it naturally gets more attention in this narrative.

⁶⁸ Leffler, 'National security & US foreign policy', 20-21. Ibid., 29-31. Jervis, 'Cold War', 52-53.

⁶⁹ Gaddis, *Strategies of containment*, 83-88.

However, a narrow concentration on the White House's role in the early Cold War does not give a complete picture of the situation. U.S. policy was not only shaped by Truman's planners and advisers: outside events had their impact as well. A look at two of these events, namely the role of European states in the early Cold War, and the effect of the Korean War, will shine an important light on the history of U.S. policy in the early Cold War.

The United States had emerged from the Second World War as by far the most powerful nation on Earth. It was in a prime position to establish a hegemony over the world, an act it promptly undertook in (Western) Europe, where such a thing had not previously existed. Now, with Europe prostrate owing to the destruction of the war, the road to penetration of the continent by U.S. power lay wide open. Traditionally, the establishment of American hegemony in Europe has been attributed to either a defensive reaction to Soviet expansionism, or to the expansionism of the United States itself (as mentioned in Chapter 1, these two hypotheses on the origins of Cold War are known as traditionalism and revisionism, respectively). In neither theory was there any independent role for the European countries: they were helpless victims in the face of an imperial power, whether the U.S. or the USSR.⁷⁰

Later scholarship has tended to look for different explanations. One of the most famous of these was forwarded by the Norwegian historian Geir Lundestad in an article published in 1986. In it, Lundestad posited an idea that can best be described with a phrase he coined himself: “empire by invitation.” His argument rests both on an analysis of the economic aid that was so crucial to Kennan's idea of containment, as well as the military commitment that became a staple of the containment policy that was actually implemented by the Truman administration. The countries of Western Europe desired both. Lundestad in effect argues that an unsure and sometimes unwilling American superpower was invited to become hegemon by the states of (Western) Europe, who greatly feared that the U.S. would abandon Europe in favor of isolating itself as it had done after World War I, leaving them without a counterweight against the Soviet Union. An “invitation” by the countries of Eastern Europe would also have taken place, had they not been pressured into deferring from making use of the European Recovery Program by Moscow.⁷¹

Lundestad's “empire by invitation” should not be mistaken for depicting a wholly passive U.S. pulled into Europe by eager allies. It has been criticized (by Melvyn P. Leffler, for instance), among other things for making the American role in the origins of the Cold War look too reactive and benign,

⁷⁰ Cox, 'Truman Doctrine', 26-28.

⁷¹ Lundestad, 'Empire by invitation', 268-272.

ignoring aggressive moves such as the desire for an extensive base network, alongside economic access to the European market. Nevertheless, Lundestad shows convincingly how the pace and character of U.S. policy was not only shaped in Washington offices. This makes his argument an important addition to the White House-centered narrative included above.⁷²

Another supplement to the containment-centered argument is that of external events. Though it may seem a straightforward conclusion, unexpected happenings abroad could and did influence U.S. policy, sometimes more so than the effort made behind the desks of the Policy Planning Staff. One could easily forget this, were he to concentrate solely on the intellectual history of containment.

Several events contributed to the shift in U.S. foreign policy under Truman. The first of these was 1948 Berlin blockade, which served to heighten fears of a new war to a level unseen since the end of World War II. The U.S. furthermore suffered reverses in East Asia. The communist takeover of the Chinese mainland put a great big dent in the U.S.'s plans for the region. China, originally, had been included in Roosevelt's Four Policemen concept as a counterweight to the Soviet Union. Now, it had become communist. The event caused an uproar in Congress and led to calls for direct military action. The detonation of the first Soviet atomic bomb, like the "loss" of China also in 1949, did not help to calm American nerves either. The major catalyst, however, which crystallized the militarization of containment and shut the door on any prospect of short-term rapprochement, was the Korean War. Starting in 1950, the sudden and unprovoked attack by communist North Korean forces on the South was widely believed to have been orchestrated by the Kremlin. Many believed it to be a step in the direction of world conquest (though many experts on Soviet affairs cautioned that Moscow was anything but in pursuit of a global war). This majority sentiment was only strengthened further when the Chinese entered the conflict.⁷³

The effect these events had on U.S. policy can be found in the top secret NSC-68 report, published in 1950. This was a document authorized by the National Security Council, which had been created in 1947 in order to deal with U.S. strategy, but was in effect drafted by an ad hoc commission of State and Defense Department officials. It concluded that "the assault on free institutions is worldwide now" and committed the U.S. to defending against any communist takeovers anywhere in the world. Even any insults or mishaps of American diplomacy could be seen as helping the Soviet cause. This in effect made public relations a central element of strategy, and hugely broadened the

⁷² Leffler, 'What do "We Now Know"?', 522.

⁷³ An example of such a dovish expert can be found in TOF, CF, Reel 10 0066-0102, Rear Admiral L.C. Stevens, Address to the National War College, January 25, 1951.

scope of containment beyond what Kennan (who was only concerned with denying control of too much industrial and demographic strength to the Soviets) had originally envisioned. Indeed, it also went far beyond that of containment as it had up until then been implemented. What was more, the military element in containment became even more predominant as U.S. policy-makers and their colleagues in allied nations worried that a Soviet attack was imminent. Expansion of the armed forces came to be viewed as crucial. The conclusion reached in NSC-68 was no different: “Without superior aggregate military strength ... a policy of 'containment' ... is no more than a policy of bluff.”⁷⁴ When the Korean War, which began mere months after the publication of NSC-68, seemed to validate the report's arguments, defense budgets across the Western bloc jumped. The U.S. defense budget increased by more than 257% in the fiscal year of 1951 as a result. Yet American commitments were greater than they had been at any time before, with more than 400,000 U.S. troops fighting in a place that had previously described as of “slight strategic importance” by the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff. The Cold War had perhaps begun in 1947, but there was no way back now.⁷⁵

Conclusions

The foreign policy of the United States went through dramatic changes in the immediate postwar period. Though conflict was largely unforeseen, it underwent increasing amounts of confrontation with the Soviet Union, all the while subject to an internal logic among policy-makers, and to events in the wider world. As World War II drew to a close in the spring of 1945, the main concern was what to do with the defeated Axis powers. What to do about the Soviets, who had advanced deep into Central Europe, was a secondary consideration. It was certainly not an adversary: an important member of the war's grand alliance, it had been envisioned as a postwar partner by Franklin Roosevelt, Truman's predecessor as President. Roosevelt's ideas of how to deal with the Soviet can be characterized as containment through integration. Truman, uninformed about Roosevelt's intentions, soon modified this approach by attempting to bargain with Moscow as part of a *quid quo pro* strategy, in the words of his ambassador to Moscow, W. Averell Harriman. This did not work, however, and in fact worked counter-productively, feeding Soviet suspicions about U.S. intentions, because there was little the Americans had to bargain with when it came to the largely self-sufficient Soviet Union.

It was at this point that George F. Kennan managed to impress his views of Soviet intentions on

⁷⁴ TOF, Subject File (hereafter: SF), Reel 38 0573-0689, NSC-68.

⁷⁵ Gaddis, *Strategies of containment*, 111.

Washington policy circles. He went on to become the director of the State Department's Policy Planning Staff. There, he played a central role in formulating the famous containment strategy. This was originally a largely economic effort designed to prevent communist takeovers by stimulating economic recovery in a war-ravaged Europe (and Japan). However, the Truman administration's implementation of Kennan's strategy diverged from his conception of it: containment was militarized, and the means (now largely military) were put above the ends, which was to end the Cold War by bringing the Soviets into detente. This process was only strengthened by events outside the control of Washington officials, those of the Policy Planning Staff first of all. Such processes include the eager European invitation of American power into Europe, the Berlin Blockade, the "loss" of China, and the Korean War. Especially the latter contributed to creating an atmosphere in the White House, encouraged by Congress, in which the United States increasingly broadened its worldwide commitments to contain communism and the Soviet Union. In so doing, the Cold War, on the Western side at least, was allowed to crystallize and militarize.

4. Geopolitics in the Sources

Before beginning with the analysis of the primary source material, it will perhaps be helpful to say something about the sources used. What are they, where do they come from, and what can they tell? The primary source material I have gathered comes from several collections. Of these, the bulk of the material was found in the *Harry S. Truman Office Files* and the *Documentary History of the Truman Presidency*. Both of these are publications of University Press of America: the former is on microfilm, organized in various files, and the latter is collected in thirty-five volumes, organized according to the major issues that Truman and his administration had to deal with. Both of these collections are composed of material taken from the Harry S. Truman Papers, which are in the possession of the Harry S. Truman Library in Independence, Missouri. The majority of the archival material cited below is from the *Truman Office Files*, in particular the *Correspondence File* and *Subject File* from that collection. These files contain largely different documents (though sometimes one encounters the same document twice), organized according to correspondent and (political) subject, respectively. Some of the material (consisting of reports by the National Security Council) I have taken from *Foreign Relations of the United States*, which is a publication of the U.S. Department of State.

The bulk of the collected material consists of letters, memorandums, reports, and telegrams. It deals with the many varied issues, whether ordinary or grandiose, that the Truman administration was faced with in conducting its foreign policy. Thus the subject matter ranges from the question of what to discuss with Soviet and other officials in official diplomatic meetings, to investigating the motivations, objectives, and future policy of the Soviet Union toward the United States and the implications that had for American interests. Many of the documents were highly classified and thus only available to the top echelons of the administration, meaning it contains valuable information on the way of thinking and the policy-making process within the government. They were not meant for public use.

It is perhaps not surprising that most of the consulted documents deal with the issue of relations with the Soviet Union, and the issue of Soviet and communist expansion (real and perceived). Other subjects include the recovery of Europe, economic and military cooperation among the non-communist countries (e.g. the North Atlantic Treaty), the many crises of the period (such as those in Trieste, Berlin, China, or Korea), diplomatic summits and meetings, the missions of American envoys and other officials, and many other things besides. All of these issues had to do in at least some way with the question of policy toward the Soviet Union. The recovery of Western Europe, for instance, was deemed

crucial for its ability to resist Soviet pressure. The Soviet Union was an overarching concern that permeated almost all areas of foreign policy. Furthermore, it is perhaps important to remark here that all the documents consulted deal primarily with foreign policy, even reports of Congressional hearings, or letters from Senators. In a democracy like the U.S. the legislative process is of course crucial to foreign policy, but the emphasis in this thesis is on the policy-making process, and this lies primarily with the executive branch—that is to say, with the President and his cabinet. As a result, less attention is focused on the role of domestic politics in this process, though it is a background element that will not be ignored.

The consulted primary sources provide crucial insight into the inner workings of the Truman administration. It is here, in the correspondence, the memorandums, and the many reports exchanged between the members of that administration, that any influence of geopolitical theories on foreign policy choices can be found. However, this leaves the important question of how exactly to trace any such influence, if it is present. The documents are raw material. How to analyze it?

The answer lies in a two-pronged approach: quantitative and qualitative analysis. First, the use of geopolitical terminology and thinking will be categorized and then analyzed quantitatively. The reader will be reminded of the research question: how often are geopolitical theories and their authors mentioned in the consulted primary sources? The quantitative analysis of the sources will be dealt with in the next chapter.

The quantitative approach: Terms to look for in the source material

Tracing the influence of a particular idea or group of ideas in a field as practical as that of government policy presents a difficult problem. How does one prove such influence, if indeed it is provable at all? How does one define “influence,” and, perhaps more crucial still, how does one measure it? A partial answer can be found in the investigation of the archival material in a simple quantitative manner. The approach is straightforward: to look for undeniably geopolitical terms in President Truman's office papers, and count their frequency of use. This says something about their relative importance in the policy-making process: if many of the documents contain geopolitical terminology, then that is an indication that geopolitics was an element in policy, or at least in the thinking of the administration's members. The data thus compiled can also be used to reach conclusions on any development over time in the influence of geopolitics. The frequency of terms may increase or decrease during the years of the Truman Presidency, for instance.

Adopting a quantitative approach of this nature, it must be said, will not say anything on the nature of context of any geopolitical thinking in the administration. No room is left for a comparison of the usage of geopolitical terminology to any other kind of special terminology, or to the rest of the documents researched (let alone the entire body of material). It would not, in any case, be very fruitful. Rather than attempting to put data included below into perspective quantitatively, it is better to do so qualitatively, by analyzing the actual contents of the documents.

Before coming to that, however, it is necessary to first establish what is meant by geopolitics, and what consequently to look for in the sources. Geopolitics, as established in chapter two, is a particular body of international relations theory. It is thus different from the general, undifferentiated usage of the term as a shorthand for international politics. Because it is an independent theoretical discipline, geopolitics has a terminology which is readily identifiable as being geopolitical, even if it is not explicitly referred to as such (which, it must be said, is often the case in the sources).

Defining what terms can be construed as unambiguously geopolitical becomes easier in the historical context of this thesis. In the period of the Truman Presidency there were three geopolitical theories that were of major influence in the Anglo-Saxon world: Mahan's, Mackinder's, and Spykman's. Especially the latter two used a specific terminology which is hard to miss, and had a particular focus which is easy to identify. First and foremost of these is of course the preoccupation with the three major geographical areas of Heartland, Inner Crescent or Rimland, and Outer Crescent. Other such concepts include the juxtaposition of land and sea power, a concern with the relative combinations of industrial and demographic power among nations, a concentration on the use of infrastructure in order to unlock the potential of certain geographical regions (as in Mackinder's Heartland), and the conviction that the international environment must be governed by a balance of power. For both Mackinder as well as Spykman, no one power could be allowed to dominate the Eurasian continent (a term which was pioneered as a political unit, "Euro-Asia," by Mackinder in his 1904 article).⁷⁶ This was also a major concern for many planners within the U.S. government under Truman.

As a result, when any of these elements are specifically tied to geography in order to come to an analysis of the international environment, it is quite possible to term such an analysis geopolitical. A concern with how much industrial and demographic strength a state possesses is of course not limited to geopoliticians; yet when such a concern is presented in geographical terms (e.g. that the Soviet Union may come to dominate the world because it controls all of Eurasia), it is hard not to see it as

⁷⁶ Parker, *Western geopolitical thought*, 38.

geopolitical. The same goes for Soviet expansion: the expansion of any power is of course of interest to any field of international relations theory. However, when the focus shifts to expansion across Eurasia from a particular geographical area (e.g. the Heartland or the Rimland), and the implications of such an event for the global balance of power (i.e. a vast concentration of industrial and demographic power leading to world domination), it can again safely be argued that this is a geopolitical interpretation.

With that in mind it becomes possible to draw up a list of terms, or combinations of terms, which are unambiguously geopolitical. These will then be counted in the source material:

- Geopolitics;
- Heartland;
- Pivot area;
- Inner Crescent/Rimland;
- Outer Crescent;
- Points/strong points;
- Lines/perimeter;
- (Domination of) Eurasia;
- World/global domination (out of domination of Eurasia);
- Centers of population and/or production;
- Land power & sea/maritime power (preferably juxtaposed).

The quantitative approach: Results

Out of at least 3000 pages worth of material from the collections that researched, 989 pages of archival documents were relevant to this thesis. This selection was made based on the criterion that for a document to be relevant, it had to do with relations with the Soviet Union, the various containment programs (such as the Military Assistance Program or the European Recovery Plan), the perceived Soviet or communist threat and what to do about it, or important events in the early Cold War (such as the Berlin blockade or the Korean War). The documents are spread out over all the years in which President Truman was in office, excepting of course his twenty final days in office early in 1953, before handing over power to Dwight D. Eisenhower.

In total, 82 documents are part of the selection. Out of these, 44, or just over half, contain geopolitical terminology and exhibit geopolitical thinking. It is interesting to note that as time went on there is an increasing amount of documents influenced by geopolitics, though there is an early high in

1946, with 13 documents (see Table 1 below).

Table 1. Frequency of geopolitical terms in policy documents according to year, 1945-1952

Year	Total documents	Documents influenced by geopolitics
1945	11	0
1946	21	13
1947	6	2
1948	5	3
1949	8	6
1950	13	7
1951	11	7
1952	7	6

Source: FRUS, DHTP, & TOF: CF, SF, KWF.

Though there appears to be a statistical trend here, this may be misleading. This is both because of the early peak exhibited in 1946, and the fact that the sample is probably not large enough to establish the trend's significance in a statistically satisfying way. There may be more (or less) examples of geopolitics in sources that have not been consulted. It is important, however, to note that the proportion of documents influenced by geopolitics, relative to the total number of documents consulted, increases over the years.

It should also be noted that the numbers in 1947 suggest a conclusion (little geopolitics in these years) that cannot be supported if one looks at the character of the sources: one of the documents from 1947 is a large intelligence handbook on Soviet capabilities and positions, which was disseminated widely throughout the administration. It thus provides a cardinal indication of the administration's thinking on the Cold War. Listing it as one of only two geopolitical documents in 1947 belies its importance as a source.

There is a tentative explanation to be found for the sudden peak in 1946, which has twice as many instances of geopolitical influence than any other year. This was the year in which relations with the Soviet Union took a dramatic turn for the worse. George F. Kennan sent his Long Telegram (which is one of the documents consulted) in February of 1946, and it dramatically changed U.S. perceptions

of Soviet behavior, convincing many in the administration that concessions to the Soviet Union were useless, firm resistance to Soviet demands being the only option.

This is linked to a process undergone by American foreign policy during the Truman administration: as time went on, hostility toward the Soviets increased. 1946 is the beginning of this process. Hostility became total in 1949-50, with the detonation of the first Soviet atomic bomb, the “loss” of China, and the onset of the Korean War. This is also when instances of geopolitical thinking reached a stable level two to six times higher than previous years (except 1946).

A criticism that might be leveled against the figures and the conclusion drawn above might be that it represents a small amount of the total output of documents in the Truman administration (which reached into the many ten thousands of pages). While this is true, this charge can be met by pointing out that many of the consulted documents are some of the most important of the period, including not only the Long Telegram, but also crucial National Security Council reports such as NSC-20/4 and NSC-68, as well as many letters, reports, and memos by important institutions and individuals in planning and carrying out containment. These include not only Kennan, but also the Joint Chiefs of Staff, W. Averell Harriman, James F. Byrnes, George C. Marshall, Dean Acheson, Dwight D. Eisenhower, and many others. It can safely be said, therefore, that the consulted sources deal with a large part of early American Cold War policy.

What about the geopolitical terminology searched for in the documents? It must first be remarked that the first six terms listed, namely “geopolitics” and five terms that were coined by the most important geopoliticians, are never mentioned in the sources. This leads to an important conclusion, namely that a direct link between the theories of Mahan, Mackinder, and Spykman and U.S. early Cold War policy cannot be demonstrated. The authors are never explicitly mentioned in the sources, either.

How, then, is it possible that there are 44 documents that exhibit geopolitical thinking? This is because the other listed terms, which are less clearly associated with the geopolitical theories of the era but are nevertheless geopolitical in nature, do appear in the sources. “Points” and “lines” are concepts first expanded upon by Kennan in his role as chief of the State Department's Policy Planning Staff; they include crucial areas and regions that should be held against Soviet expansion (points), and groups of these areas (lines), in the environs surrounding the Soviet Union. The other terms and concepts listed are frequent concerns of both State Department and National Security Council planners, as well as those of the military establishment (usually in the form of the Joint Chiefs of Staff). That these latter

issues are not merely examples of general realist thinking in terms of relative power, but are rather geopolitical in nature, is borne out by the fact that they are tied to specific geographical areas and constellations, which makes the analyses thus produced implicitly geopolitical.

This implicitness is tied to a conclusion that can now be reached, namely that the influence of geopolitics on policy in these years was implicit rather than explicit. It becomes possible to speak of a *geopolitics of containment*, which is quite similar to actual theoretical geopolitics. Indeed, it is probable that the latter is the origin of the former, but (sadly) the relationship is entirely unclear from the available evidence. Tentative support for this hypothesis is provided by e.g. Gaddis, who notes that the geopolitics of Mackinder and Spykman were widely disseminated in the years after the Second World War, and indeed explicitly draws the comparison himself. This is also pointed out by Leffler, who speaks of a postwar “revival of geopolitical thinking” in the same period. Nevertheless, the precise nature of the relation between theoretical geopolitics and the geopolitics of containment cannot be satisfactorily explained at this moment; the evidence is simply too circumstantial.⁷⁷

Table 2. Frequency of specific geopolitical terms in documents influenced by geopolitics (in percentages)

Term	Frequency
Points/strong points	13 (29.5%)
Lines/perimeter	8 (18.2%)
(Domination of) Eurasia	35 (79.5%)
World/global domination	28 (63.6%)
Centers of population/production	32 (72.7%)
Land/sea power	11 (25%)

Source: FRUS, DHTP & TOF: CF, SF, KWF.

N.B. Some terms and concepts appear multiple times in the same document, hence the total amount of terms counted (127) exceeds the total amount of selected documents (44).

If the first six terms searched for were not found, which can be found in the sources instead? How often do they appear? What, in other words, were the main focuses of the geopolitics of containment? As

⁷⁷ Gaddis, *Strategies of containment*, 57-58. See also *ibid.*, 370, n. 8. Leffler, "National security & US foreign policy", 36, n. 23.

Table 2 shows, it was the prospect of Soviet domination of Eurasia, coupled with the immense increase in Soviet industrial and demographic strength that would bring, that out of geopolitical fears worried Washington officials of the Truman years the most. Almost 80% of the selected documents exhibit this fear of a Soviet-controlled Eurasia, and about 73% deal with the possible consequences. This is in contrast to ideas about land and sea power, or defending certain geographical lines or strong points, which are both found in less than one third of the selected documents. It should be noted that, while the conviction that Moscow was after global domination (which shows up in around 64% of documents) became increasingly strong as the years went on, becoming virtually unquestioned by 1949, this was not always a geopolitical concern. The administration's planners often as not assumed that the perceived Soviet drive toward world empire was a result of communist ideology rather than geopolitical position or power.

Conclusions

A quantitative analysis of the sources reveals that geopolitics was of measurable influence on American Cold War policy during the Truman Presidency. About half of the documents consulted for this thesis contain such influence. This influence, in quantitative terms, peaks early in Truman's presidency, in 1946, followed by a sudden drop, and then a steady rise to a stable level during the President's second term. This parallels the development that U.S. foreign policy went through in general during this period, with 1946 marking the year in which Washington abandoned cooperation with the Soviet Union as a viable policy, followed by increasing hostility and tension during Truman's second term in office.

Turning toward the particular geopolitical concerns of the Truman administration, it can immediately be said that there is no explicit, direct connection between the theories of geopolitics that were influential at the time, and U.S. policy. Rather, the influence of geopolitics was implicit in nature, revealing an understanding of geopolitics within the government without direct reference to the major Anglo-Saxon geopoliticians. This was the geopolitics of containment. The main issues that Washington planners and their superiors identified as part of this "in-house" geopolitics, was the prospect of Soviet domination of Eurasia, and the concurrent immense rise in industrial potential and population this would bring. The U.S. would be left to face such a colossus alone.

Upon reaching this conclusion, it stands to reason to ask: if there is no explicit reference to formal, theoretical geopolitics in the sources, is there a geopolitics of containment in the first place? After all, how does one demonstrate any influence of geopolitics on President Truman's national

security policy if the term is not even used in any of the administration's documents? Are the terms described above not simply part of traditional realist discourse? Such doubt is legitimate. A quantitative analysis alone is not sufficient to show that the geopolitics of containment indeed existed at all. It therefore becomes necessary to delve into the documents themselves, to discern just what the geopolitical thinking of the Truman administration was, and discover the true character of the geopolitics of containment.

5. The Geopolitics of Containment

Having established that early American Cold War policy had a geopolitics of its own, a follow-up question immediately presents itself. What was this geopolitics of containment like? What, in other words, was the nature of geopolitical thought within the Truman administration? Before answering these questions, it is first useful to provide a brief introduction to the history of this geopolitics of containment, as distilled from the primary sources. Its historical development parallels that of U.S. policy in the immediate postwar period as a whole. As shown in chapter three, President Truman's first year in office was spent trying to accommodate the Soviets in a “firm but friendly” way. Though the tone had become harsher, the goal was still to incorporate the Soviet Union in a postwar world order that was supposed to encompass the whole world (“one world,” in the terms of Franklin Roosevelt's wartime ambassador-at-large, Wendell Wilkie). This approach was abandoned as disagreements increased. The idea that concessions to Moscow could bring it to abandon its suspicions and hostility was discarded in favor of a much more uncompromising line, which grew into the policy of containment. This had as goal stopping the spread of communism (interpreted as Soviet expansionism) outside the areas it already dominated, and eventually through this line bringing about a change in Soviet attitudes. Starting out as a largely economic program focused on providing stability and prosperity to non-communist countries where communist takeovers were likely, containment grew to become militarized as hostility to and fear of Soviet aspirations grew within Washington. The U.S. under Truman thus went from pursuing accommodation of the Soviets to involvement in a global political conflict with them—the Cold War.

The geopolitics of containment went through a similar process. Initially, as we have seen, geopolitics did not exist inside the Beltway. This is logical, for the Soviet Union was not yet seen as an enemy in the immediate aftermath of World War II. However, when the perceptions within the Truman administration changed radically in early 1946, and policy followed suit as a result, geopolitics suddenly appeared on the scene, 1946 being the year with the most documents influenced by geopolitics. The amount of such documents dropped dramatically in the next two years (though, as noted in the previous chapter, this does not accurately reflect the importance of the documents in these years), but the proportion of geopolitical compared to non-geopolitical documents rises. More than half of all the geopolitical documents are from Truman's second term in office. This was during the years in which fears of Soviet expansion reached fever pitch, owing to perceived reverses suffered over the

course of 1949 (such as the communist takeover of China and the detonated of the first Soviet atomic bomb) and the sudden onset of the Korean War. The militarization of containment showed through in, for instance, the proliferation of war plans drawn up by defense officials, speculating on the possible course of a war with the communist bloc. The likelihood of such a war was taken very seriously, and it is in such documents that the geopolitics of containment returns again and again.

What, however, was this geopolitics of analysis exactly? If it is accepted that the Truman administration has its own geopolitical perspective, an element of containment thinking as a whole, what was it like? A textual analysis of the relevant policy documents provides the answer. This will be done chronologically, in order to show how the historical development sketched above occurred in practice. It will provide insight into the nature of the geopolitics of containment, and show how this element of American foreign policy under the first postwar President fit into the grand narrative of containment.

The prehistory of containment geopolitics

As shown in chapter three, when Harry S. Truman became President of the United States, the Soviet Union was far from an enemy. It was a major wartime ally, and his predecessor, Franklin Roosevelt, had the aim throughout the war of making the Soviets peacetime allies too. The idea was to make the Soviet Union an integral part of the postwar world order. In the first days of Truman's administration, this aim remained unchanged. However, the new president's inexperience with policy at this level caused the erstwhile vice-president, who had not been informed by Roosevelt of his plans, to adopt a crucial change of tone in his diplomacy toward the Soviet Union.

This change in policy occurred in the very first days of the Truman administration. Only a week after taking office in the wake of Roosevelt's death, in April of 1945, Truman met with his top advisers from the State Department at the White House to discuss the impending visit of Soviet foreign minister Vyacheslav Molotov. The principal adviser present was W. Averell Harriman, the American ambassador to Moscow and the man who coined the term "*quid quo pro*." Truman and Harriman discussed the issue of the so-called Lublin Government, the Soviet-aligned Polish communist provisional government. This had been established in the city of Lublin following the Soviet conquest of Poland. Harriman informed the President that he thought the Soviets were pursuing two policies at the same time: "one, the policy of cooperation with the United States and Great Britain, and the other, the extension of Soviet control over neighboring states through unilateral action." The ambassador was convinced that

American “generosity and desire to cooperate” was being misinterpreted by Moscow as a license to do whatever it pleased. What was more, Harriman ventured, the U.S. was faced with a “barbarian invasion of Europe.” Truman, in reply, was adamant that under no circumstances would he allow the Soviets to breach the agreement on Poland, reached at Yalta in 1945, to make the Lublin Government more democratic. He intended to “be firm with the Russians” and that he refused to make any concessions to the Russians on “American principles or traditions for the fact of winning their favor” (already in April 1945!). “Only on a give and take basis could any relation be established,” was the new president's firm conclusion.⁷⁸

This tough, even confrontational line, which differed markedly from Roosevelt's conciliatory attempts to win over Stalin, was repeated in further discussions that week. These were also held to prepare for Molotov's visit. The issue at hand was again the Lublin Government. This time, Truman and his closest advisers (in addition to Harriman, Secretary of the Navy James Forrestal) were pitted against many members of the previous administration. The latter were noticeably more dovish. Truman remarked that if the Soviets were not prepared to cooperate, “they could go to hell.” He was supported, in less combative terms, by Harriman and Forrestal in this view, while the old guard (among others, Secretary of State Edward R. Stettinius, Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson, and General George C. Marshall) was still convinced that the Kremlin was a partner that could be relied on. They shied away from the new, harsher tone, fearing a confrontation.⁷⁹

The same day, Truman met with Molotov. The Soviet foreign minister did not get much time to speak, because the President and his top cabinet members spoke most of the time. As he had promised three days earlier, Truman demanded that the Soviet Union carry out the Yalta agreement to the letter in Poland, and remove its support for the Lublin Government. He even threatened economic consequences if that did not happen, assuring Molotov that he could inform Stalin of this “immediately.” This action greatly alarmed the Kremlin, leading to an immediate deterioration in relations. A similar and related occurrence took place when Truman sent Stalin a message demanding the Soviets withdraw their troops from Czechoslovakia in November of 1945, in concordance with the unilateral withdrawal of American troops from that country, because the Allied (read: Soviet) troop presence was delaying “the normal recovery and rehabilitation of this Allied state.”⁸⁰

⁷⁸ TOF, SF, Reel 38 0050-0052, 'Memorandum of conversation', April 20, 1945.

⁷⁹ TOF, SF, Reel 38 0062-0065, 'Memorandum of meeting at the White House', April 23, 1945.

⁸⁰ TOF, SF, Reel 38 0068-0070, 'Memorandum of conversation', April 23, 1945. Gaddis, *Strategies of containment*, 16. TOF, CF, Reel 13 0654-0658, 'Draft message from the President to Generalissimus Stalin', October 29, 1945.

Though the tone had become a lot less friendly, there was no question of any geopolitics at this point in time. This is of course logical, because there was no question of containment, either. The Soviet Union was still a partner, even if it was being dealt with differently now, and despite the differences existing between it and the United States. There was no reason for an explanation of Soviet expansionism and its consequences because such a phenomenon was still taken as being incidental, a result of the Second World War, and no more. Nevertheless, as 1945 went on and disagreements between the two major Allied powers increased, especially when it came to the Soviet presence in Central and Eastern Europe, members of the administration began to wonder why their bargaining approach was not working. As told in chapter three, it was in this context that they approached George F. Kennan at the Moscow embassy, producing the Long Telegram, which radically changed American perceptions of U.S. actions.

1946: The geopolitics of containment is born

What is interesting about the emergence of a geopolitics of containment is that it emerged so suddenly. Throughout the first year of the Truman Presidency, despite increasing tensions and misunderstandings, geopolitics as an element in the thinking of the administration was conspicuously absent. As 1946 began geopolitical analyses of Soviet behavior came out of the woodwork, as it were.

The first instance of a geopolitical analysis of Soviet intentions, behavior, and actions occurred even before Kennan was given the opportunity to voice his opinion to his superiors in Washington. This was a 43-page report written by Edward F. Willett, and commissioned by Forrestal, who disseminated it within the administration for all to read. Dated January 14, 1946, it was titled “Dialectical Materialism and Russian Objectives,” and was written in order (as Willett wrote in the foreword) to understand why the USSR and the U.S. had come into conflict. The explanation, according to the author, was to be found in the ideological underpinnings of the Soviet regime, which saw a conflict with capitalist democracy as inevitable. It should be noted that the report was still a product of the *quid quo pro* policy, despite the concern for the internal motivations of the Kremlin that it shared with its more famous counterpart, the Long Telegram. Willett stated that “maintaining peaceful relations between Soviet Russia and the United States” was still the most important international question facing the world of his day. Achieving a *modus vivendi* between the two superpowers was crucial.⁸¹

If its primary concern was with ideology, how was this the earliest document showcasing the

⁸¹ TOF, SF, Reel 37 0461-0505, Edward F. Willett, 'Dialectical materialism and Russian objectives', January 14, 1946.

influence of geopolitics? After explaining the tenets of dialectical materialism and Soviet communism, the document included a section on “Russia's objectives.” Under the header of “possible non-communist objectives,” Willett discussed the geopolitical concept of “ring of satellites” around the Soviet Union as a possible Soviet objective, in order (he posited) to “serve as a springboard” for further expansion (strongly reminiscent of Mackinder's idea of an expansionist Heartland). Willett again returned to geopolitics a few pages onward, when he discussed possible avenues of Soviet expansion in order to increase the economic power and self-sufficiency of the Soviet Union. Again, this took place in a ring around Soviet territory, and its principle thrusts were outward in the direction of important sea lanes (the Dardanelles and the Persian Gulf, according to Willett) and resources (oil in Iran).⁸²

Willett's report is thus the earliest instance of geopolitical thinking found in the administration. This is even despite the fact that it was written primarily with ideology as an explanation of Soviet behavior, and despite the fact that it is still an example of *quid quo pro* thinking. Strictly speaking, however, it is not an example of the geopolitics of containment: containment had yet to be formulated, as had the document upon which its tenets were based, the Long Telegram.

Kennan's telegram and its consequences have already been discussed. Suffice it to say here that it was a crucial document which changed American perceptions of Soviet actions and laid the basis for a new policy toward the Soviet Union, one in which accommodation was no longer the goal. Washington accepted that “one world” was no longer a possibility, owing (it now reasoned) to Soviet intransigence and paranoia, and instead accepted the idea that the world was divided in two. Kennan's recommendation that it would be best, given this situation, to pursue a balance of power which would serve American interests, was readily accepted.⁸³

This is clearly shown in classified studies of Soviet foreign policy, “as it applies to specific areas of the world,” that were conducted by the State Department in the months that followed. Circulated in the cabinet from March through April of 1946, these six documents offer a revealing insight into the way Soviet actions were now interpreted in Truman's government. At the same time, they show the origins of the geopolitics of containment, for each of the reports bears its influence. The first paper, titled “Background of Soviet Foreign Policy,” in fact began with tracing the “two geographical constants which have profoundly affected Russian foreign policy”: a drive to the sea and

⁸² TOF, SF, Reel 37 0490-0492 & 0501, Edward F. Willett, 'Dialectical materialism and Russian objectives', January 14, 1946.

⁸³ Gaddis, *Strategies of containment*, 56-57. *Documentary History of the Truman Presidency* (hereafter: DHTP): 7, Doc. 9: George F. Kennan, Telegram, Moscow to State via War, February 22, 1946.

a geographically conditioned proclivity to expand into Europe. This was because of a lack of “any barriers more difficult than rivers and marshes” separating the “Russian land mass” from Europe. This is the clearest example of the geopolitical thought within the Truman administration seen so far, closely following Mackinder's concept of the Heartland and his juxtaposition of land and sea power. The report's introduction went on to draw a direct line between “Czarist” and Soviet foreign policy. It alleged that the Soviets' aim to acquire Riga and Port Arthur (in China), as well as internationalize the Turkish Straits and establish bases in the Dodecanese, were all examples of this “classic” Russian expansion toward the sea. The Soviet regime was, in the postwar era, no longer conditioned by “internationalist” goals of revolution, but “national” goals of territorial aggrandizement. State Department planners in 1946 thus strongly emphasized the geographical nature and (particularly) continuity which characterized postwar Soviet actions. The rest of the document discusses the various tools of Soviet expansionism, including not only international communist parties, but also the Orthodox Church and even various international organizations. This is something seen throughout this series.⁸⁴

The second report, dated a week later, assessed Soviet policy toward Western Europe. It took this to be mainly a matter of French politics, because the policies of France's neighbors “to a considerable degree, reflect French political trends.” At the time, this included a strong communist party controlling over a quarter of the French vote. The paper went on to identify the Mediterranean as another crucial area of Soviet expansionism and it is here that containment geopolitics once again features. This is because it was assumed in the report that the Soviets desired a “security zone” in the western Mediterranean by taking control of several crucial points, such as Tangier on the Strait of Gibraltar. The same is held to be true about Soviet policy toward the Baltic, where the goal was again to neutralize opposition from nearby countries and create a Soviet lake. Nevertheless, it must be said that the influence of geopolitics here is less prominent than in the previous report. This is mainly because its focus is more on practical matters, such as the threat of communist takeovers in Western Europe, than on analyses of Soviet intent or the implications of Russian actions. In this it reflects the tripartite nature of the geopolitics of containment as described above.⁸⁵

The third report in the series provided a summary of Soviet foreign policy. Like Edward Willett's paper, it spoke of the Soviet Union pursuing the formation of a “security zone” in a ring surrounding it. According to the State Department officials who wrote the document, this ring was

⁸⁴ DHTP: 7, Doc. 9: Department of State, 'Background of Soviet foreign policy', March 14, 1946.

⁸⁵ DHTP: 7, Doc. 16: Department of State, 'Soviet foreign policy toward Western Europe', March 21, 1946.

regarded by the Soviet Union as its exclusive preserve. From this ring it hoped to expand into areas contested with other powers, such as Germany, the paper alleged. The report concluded with the ominous statement that Soviet foreign policy “constitutes a threat to world stability” because “Soviet economic and military power have expanded so greatly and so rapidly that profound readjustments in international relations are required.” Since the report explained the expansion of Soviet power from a geographical point of view (ideology almost does not figure), this is yet another example of the geopolitics of containment.⁸⁶

Ideology features for the first time in the fourth report, which assessed “Soviet Policy Toward the Western Powers.”. It cited Leninist ideas on the inevitability of conflict between capitalism and communism as an important motivator for Soviet actions. This analysis was accompanied by a reiteration of the argument made in the first report, submitted a month before, that Soviet foreign policy was a continuation of older Czarist themes, namely to create “a complete security zone around the perimeter of the U.S.S.R.” This time, a further continuity was found by State Department planners, who drew attention to the fact that Stalin, like his imperial predecessors, clashed principally with Great Britain in order to achieve his goals, and mainly on the “Eurasian land mass,” where Russian power predominated. This is yet another striking parallel with the geopolitical theories of Mackinder, a Briton, whose opinion was hardly any different. This line was again drawn in the next of the reports, which dealt with Soviet policy in Eastern Europe. The concept of a ring around the Soviet Union as a major goal of the Kremlin's reappeared here. Again Soviet actions were held to be geographically conditioned along the same lines as the policy of the old Czars. Even more interestingly, the conflict between land and sea power was implied by the citing of the Crimean War in a short historical overview, as an example of an attempt to “stop Russia from becoming a Mediterranean sea power.” The connection with the situation in the Mediterranean in 1946 is thus strongly made.⁸⁷

The last of the Department of State's intelligence reviews was on the subject of “Soviet Foreign Policy in the Middle East.” This was the last of the specific regions where Soviet expansionism was seen as most concerning (the Iran Crisis was raging at the time). The report alleged that the main Soviet goals were to expand its security zone in the area, alongside the acquisition of “Middle East warm water ports and water ways” and the major oil-producing areas in the region. Finally, the Soviet Union's aim was to replace Britain as the major power in the area. One section was devoted to the Soviet desire

⁸⁶ DHTP: 7, Doc. 17: Department of State, 'Soviet foreign policy: A summation', ca. March/April, 1946.

⁸⁷ DHTP: 7, Doc. 18: Department of State, 'Soviet policy toward the Western powers'. Ibid., Doc. 19: Department of State, 'Soviet foreign policy in Eastern Europe'.

for ports and control of waterways such as the Dardanelles (the latter would function to push “their defensive frontier farther from their vital industries”) and the Persian Gulf. Another section reviewed the Soviet aim to control Middle Eastern oil. The report even expressed concerns over Soviet attempts to gain bases in Eritrea and in Libya, which, the State Department officials wrote, would “threaten the British life-line through the Mediterranean and the Suez Canal.” Soviet dominance in the Middle East and the eastern Mediterranean, alongside control of the Canal, “would be a factor in increasing its potential maritime and naval strength.” This is all made easier by the “geographical link” between the Soviet Union and the Middle East. Expansion on land leading directly to increasing power at sea: this was a major issue for the era's geopoliticians as well.⁸⁸

Apprehensions about the expansion of Soviet power at sea, owing to its expansion in general, are even stronger in a pair of reports by the military establishment, made in July 1946. They appear alongside alarm about the consequences that would have for the global balance of power. One, by the Navy Department, was concerned (predictably) with Soviet naval activity, and the other with Soviet military policy in general, written as it was by the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The Navy report is heavily influenced by the geopolitics of containment. It documented Soviet expansion in seemingly every direction, from the Arctic, the Baltic, the Black and the Mediterranean Seas to the Pacific Ocean. In these areas they formed a threat to every neighboring country, including the U.S. itself, across the Arctic. All of this activity was directly threatening to American security, according to Navy planners. The Soviet Union, they alleged, was trying to achieve “the historic Russian ambition to become a first class sea power.” This was almost a paraphrase of Mackinder's deep worry that Russian expansion would decisively challenge British sea power. In fact, the Navy report went on, one of the Kremlin's goals was to gain the ability to “neutralize” the British Isles militarily and, through submarine warfare, block any trans-Atlantic aid from reaching Europe. This would have effectively closed off Eurasia from the other continents. To counter this threat, the Navy officials rather predictably recommended that the Navy be expanded and equipped with the most modern technology; however, they also advised an expansion of the American base system in order to be able to encircle the Soviet Union in a grand geographical ring. This ring extended from the Atlantic, through the Mediterranean and the Middle East, to the Pacific. “The Mediterranean,” the report's authors maintained, “is the seaway deep into the land mass of Eurasia” through which U.S. power could be projected. Denying Moscow any expansion into that area was crucial. The Navy's report therefore represents an early form of containment

⁸⁸ DHTP: 7, Doc. 23: Department of State, 'Soviet foreign policy in the Middle East', April 11, 1946.

thinking, which had yet to be fully articulated by Kennan in the State Department, and one that is geopolitically conditioned.⁸⁹

The report by the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) too reflects a geopolitical mode of thinking, especially when it comes to Soviet intentions. Written in response to President Truman's request for a report on "recent activities of the Soviet Union which affect the security of the United States,"⁹⁰ it began by reviewing how well the Soviets had carried out military agreements with the U.S. (another reply to another request of the President). This rather technical section was followed by the answer to Truman's query. According to the JCS, the disposition of Soviet troops pointed to an aggressive strategy of expansion (after all, the authors remarked without any doubt, Soviet policy "has world domination as its objective"), or at the very least intimidation of the United States. These dispositions were "such as to facilitate offensive operations against western Europe or Turkey." Again, as in the Navy report, Soviet expansion in every direction, had as its aim "penetration and extension" of Soviet influence and threatened "the access of the Western powers to the important oil resources of that area." Furthermore, the JCS planners continued, "the Soviets are endeavoring to make areas within their sphere economically dependent on the USSR."⁹¹

Far more than simply a document on military cooperation in the past, and strategic dispositions at the time, this JCS report created the image of a Soviet Union expanding in every direction. Its expansion was aimed at particular geographic areas, and threatened the complete domination of the Eurasian landmass by a power hostile to the United States. It must be said, however, that the geopolitics of containment became strongest when the subject of the report was Moscow's military policies. An estimate of future Soviet military actions in the report concluded that the Soviet Union was attempting to build a closed economic sphere "east of the Stettin-Trieste line" and would attempt to include Germany in such a construct. From there, their power might have become so great that their next step would have been armed aggression, at which point "their immediate objective will be the seizure of ... most of Eurasia." The JCS recommendation to counter such a prospect in the report was not only a strong peacetime military, but also to "maintain western Europe, the Middle East, China and Japan outside the sphere of influence of the USSR." This could be facilitated by retaining the U.S.'s "outlying base system" the JCS had previously recommended, and refusing to disclose the country's nuclear

⁸⁹ DHTP: 7, Doc. 30, Department of the Navy, 'Discussion of recent activities of the Soviet Union which affect the security of the United States from the naval point of view', July 23, 1946.

⁹⁰ DHTP: 7, Doc. 28, Clark M. Clifford to William D. Leahy, July 18, 1946.

⁹¹ DHTP: 7, Doc. 31, The Joint Chiefs of Staff, 'Memorandum for the President', July 26, 1946.

secrets (a plan circulating in the UN at that time).⁹²

This advice represents another example of early or proto-containment. It also shows how the JCS report, along with its Navy counterpart, is one of the rare examples in the consulted source material in which the geopolitics of containment encompasses the entire triptych of Soviet intentions, implications for the balance of power, and policy recommendations. These two reports also showcase the strongest instances of hostility against the Soviets in this early period of the Truman Presidency, which supports another conclusion, namely that the geopolitics of containment appeared more often as hostility toward the Soviet Union increased.⁹³

Articulating containment

In 1947 and 1948, the last two years of President Truman's first term in office, the policy of containment was given concrete shape. What had begun as a change in attitude toward the Soviet Union was now translated into action as policies were created which were designed to stop any further communist advances, as well as make it clear to the Kremlin that it could not continue on its (perceived) present course of action. This coincided with the famous speech Truman gave before the (Republican-controlled) U.S. Congress, which went down in history as the Truman Doctrine. It also coincided with the appointment of George F. Kennan as first head of the State Department's Policy Planning Staff. These were also the years of the creation of the European Recovery Program (ERP), named the Marshall Plan after the new Secretary of State, former Army Chief of Staff George C. Marshall, when he gave a speech at Harvard in which he announced the program. This, too, was the time of the Berlin Blockade and the Tito-Stalin split. The Cold War had well and truly begun.

While containment was being formulated, so was its geopolitics. Though these two years contain less examples of it than in the single year of 1946, where it does occur it is perhaps more poignant still than before. It is worthwhile to note at this point the character of the sources matter, because the more analyses or discussions stray into general terms (such as Soviet intentions and their implications) the more they tend to draw from the geopolitics of containment. By contrast, when the subject is particular and technical, such as the implementation of the ERP or (Western) European

⁹² DHTP: 7, Doc. 31, The Joint Chiefs of Staff, 'Memorandum for the President', July 26, 1946. A similar report, and another example of containment geopolitics, can be found in DHTP: 7, Doc. 37: Clark M. Clifford, 'American relations with the Soviet Union: A report to the President by the Special Counsel to the President', September 24, 1946.

⁹³ Further examples in 1946 of the military approach to containment, as well as containment geopolitics, can be found in TOF, CF, Reel 13 0651-0652, William D. Leahy, 'Memorandum for the President', September 10, 1946 and TOF, CF, Reel 6 0404-0408, William D. Leahy, 'Memorandum for the President', December 31, 1946.

military cooperation, containment geopolitics is conspicuously absent.⁹⁴

This difference can best be shown by looking at a representative policy document. In a memorandum to the President dated September 29, 1947 (almost four months after Marshall's Harvard speech), Department of State officials emphasized the “immediate need” for American aid to Europe, if Washington wished to forestall imminent communist takeovers in countries such as Italy and France. These suffered from acute shortages of monetary reserves (that is, dollar shortages), and as such could not cope with economic difficulties and the effort of rebuilding their war-ravaged economies. The first part of the document consisted of a discussion of the particular problems facing these two countries and others in Europe. The Soviet Union was rarely mentioned and the focus was on the economic woes and their possible consequences, namely a communist takeover. The next part was a technical section showing the precise financial needs of these countries, with no room for reflection on power constellations or Soviet designs on expansion. Only when the memorandum's authors turned to what they termed the “foreign political aspects” of economic aid for Europe does an element of geopolitics emerge. This happens when the subject changed to the implications of communist control over Western Europe. If the “virus” of “communist totalitarianism” was allowed to “spread any further,” it would control almost the whole of Europe and result in “moving the iron curtain to the Atlantic.” In such an event, U.S. foreign policy would have “to be completely re-oriented,” because the changed power constellation in the world (with the Soviet Union now in control of everything from the Atlantic to the Pacific) would force the U.S. “to adopt drastic domestic measures and would inevitably require great and burdensome sacrifices on the part of our citizens.” A “much larger military” would have to be maintained, as well. That this concern within the State Department closely parallels the geographically conditioned balance-of-power apprehensions both Mackinder and Spykman had about Heartland expansion, is clear.⁹⁵

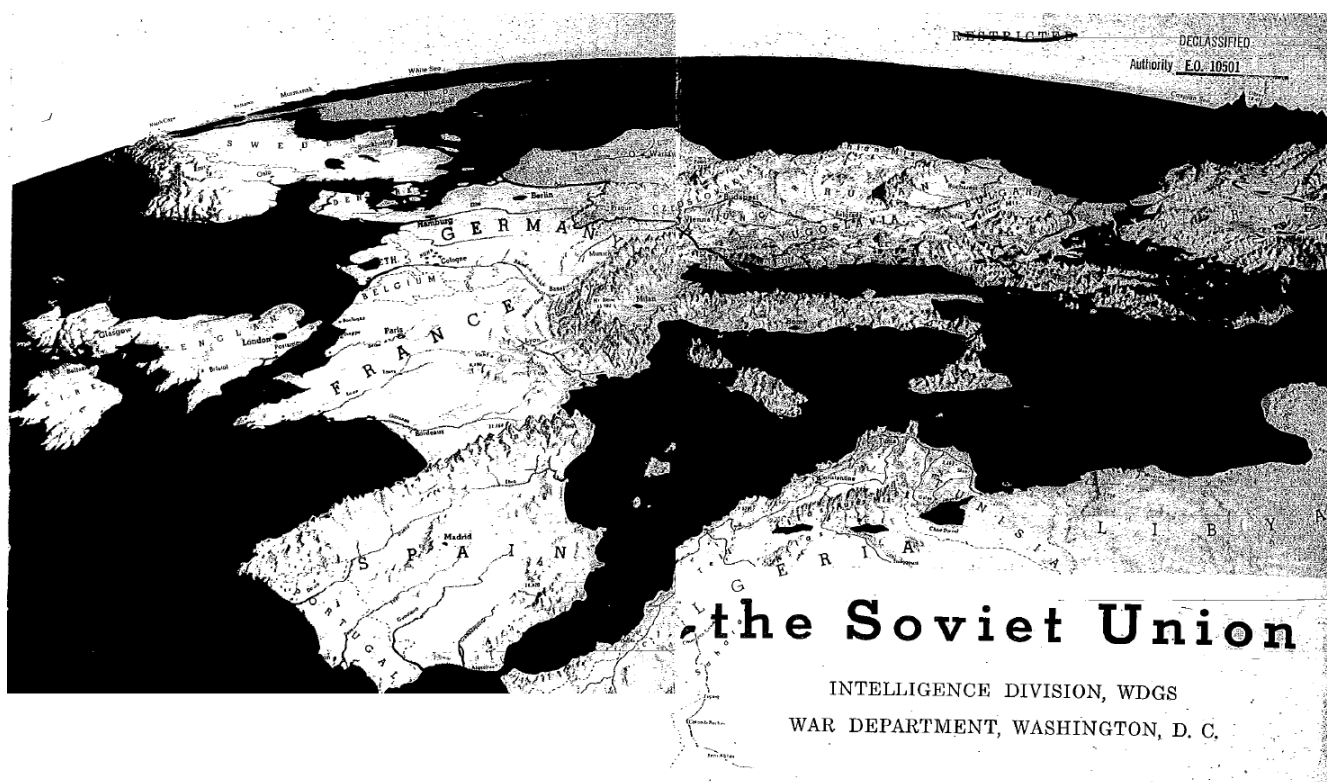
A major document of this period found in the sources is a large hundred-page handbook titled “The Soviet Union” and written by the War Department's Intelligence Division. It was released for wide distribution within the administration (especially within the military establishment) somewhere in early 1947 (there is no clear date available). Based on information on the Soviet Union and events throughout 1946, the handbook was evidently written to provide a wide range of defense officials and

⁹⁴ This can be seen in e.g. TOF, CF, Reel 7 0339, James Forrestal, 'Memorandum to the President', December 21, 1947 and TOF, CF, Reel 13 0293-0299, Robert B. Landry, 'Memorandum for the President', September 28, 1948.

⁹⁵ TOF, CF, Reel 7 0232-0249, Department of State, 'The immediate need for emergency aid to Europe', September 29, 1947.

other government employees with an overview of the structure and politics of the Soviet Union, its foreign policy, its capabilities, its intentions, and how to judge its actions abroad in 1946. This document thus represents one of the largest and most important examples of a foreign policy review within the U.S. government during this period, and certainly one of the most widely distributed (it was classified at the relatively low level of “restricted”). It is a good representation of the administration's internal thought on Cold War policy, and what it expected the lower echelons of the government to know and think about it.⁹⁶

Figure 5.1: Front & back cover of the 1947 War Department handbook



Source: TOF, SF, Reel 37 0572-0672, Intelligence Division, Department of War, 'The Soviet Union', ca. January 1947.

The handbook was divided into three sections: domestic, foreign, and military, all pertaining to aspects Soviet policy. Almost immediately, one is confronted with the geopolitics of containment: the front and back cover of the booklet are beautified by a large map, drawn with perspective (the vantage point

⁹⁶ TOF, SF, Reel 37 0572-0672, Intelligence Division, Department of War, 'The Soviet Union', ca. January 1947.

being the Mediterranean). It showed a darkly shaded mass, the Soviet Union, stretching away across the global horizon at the top of the projection, pressing down on a peripheral Europe, which was in white. This is perhaps the clearest example of the geopolitics of containment yet: a map expressing a political point (in this case, arguably in propaganda form). There are more maps, some simply political and not geopolitical, but also others which are the latter: one, on page 20 of the handbook, depicting the industrial areas and infrastructure of the Soviet Union; another on page 44, more clearly geopolitical, which shows Soviet expansion in East Asia; and finally, on page 47, a map much like the one on the cover, showing a projection across the Arctic Ocean to indicate the actual proximity of the Soviet Union to the United States and North America (which is obscured on a traditional global map projection). All of these maps are geopolitical in the sense that they make a political (or strategic) point with the aid of geography. The Arctic map, in fact, reflects the thought of prominent American geopoliticians of the era such as Vilhjalmur Stefansson, who argued for the importance of the Arctic due to the rise of air power.⁹⁷

It is not just in the maps where containment geopolitics can be found in this War Department handbook. Quite a few of the written sections, in which Soviet capabilities alongside Soviet actions were discussed and analyzed, also showcase its influence. These sections form part of the larger structure of the geopolitics of containment. This is not only in the sense that as the analysis moves toward general, strategic, or military issues, geopolitics becomes stronger, but also in the fact that containment geopolitics only form one element in the larger narrative of containment. The handbook, after all, is not completely saturated with geopolitical thinking (some sections, such as the domestic, contain none at all). Nevertheless, it must be said that in this document it is very clear and powerful, if only because of the inclusion of geopolitical maps.

The first major instance of containment geopolitics in the written part of the handbook occurs in a section with the subject of “Soviet Military Policy Toward Eastern Europe” under the “foreign” heading. Military policy was here seen as part of a greater whole including political and economic measures. In the handbook, the Soviet goal was to incorporate the militaries of its satellites in Eastern Europe as part a larger military whole. This idea was similar to that expressed in the State Department document cited above, indicating that within the Truman administration the communist bloc was seen as a large monolithic whole with its center in Moscow. This impression is strengthened in the following

⁹⁷ TOF, SF, Reel 37 0572-0672, Intelligence Division, Department of War, 'The Soviet Union', ca. January 1947. For an overview of Stefansson's theory of geopolitics, see Parker, *Western geopolitical thought*, 104-106.

section, which dealt with the “Advantages Accruing to U.S.S.R. in Far East From Yalta Agreement.” In it, the War Department's Intelligence Division asserted that Soviet activities in East Asia at the end of the Second World War strengthened its power position, as a result of control of particular geographical areas (Manchuria, Mongolia, Sakhalin, the Kurils) and infrastructure (Manchurian railroads). This, the War Department planners wrote, gave the Soviet Union the ability to further develop its Siberian industry and infrastructure, and furthermore allowed them to “flank Japan” and “limit the capabilities of an occupying force in Japan,” a clear reference to a (perceived) threat to U.S. security. The next section was concerned with the implications of “Soviet control” in Yugoslavia. Not only had this oriented Belgrade away from the West and toward the East, closing off another market to the West, wrote the War Department officials, but it had also completed Soviet “military domination of ... the eastern half of Europe.” It had “advanced her strategic frontier to the Adriatic” and provided the eastern bloc with infrastructure and communications, strengthening its internal cohesion. A similar tone can be discerned in the section on Turkey, only from the other side: Soviet expansion into Turkey had to be stopped, or else they would gain a dominant position in the eastern Mediterranean (mirroring the fear expressed in the 1946 Navy and JCS reports). Here, too, the image of a “chain of defensive buffer areas ... around U.S.S.R. frontiers” was put forward.⁹⁸

The handbook becomes truly geopolitical in a crucial section entitled “Military Implications of Soviet Foreign Policy During 1946,” under the “military” heading. In the introduction (p. 62 of the handbook) it was established that Soviet foreign policy was at least partly based on “the political implication of the Soviet geographical position,” as clear a definition of geopolitics as has ever been formulated. “The *initial* long-range Soviet aim,” the War Department planners continued, “appears to be establishment of a dominant position ... on the Eurasian land mass.” What was the true aim, then, if that was no more than an initial goal? “An unlimited extension of Soviet power,” answered the handbook. The Heartland concept was here condensed to a single paragraph.⁹⁹

This strongly geopolitical sense of Soviet policy is reaffirmed further on when a “new continental imbalance in Eurasia” was referenced, resulting from the collapse of Germany. This made the War Department's intelligence handbook perhaps the most geopolitical document cited for this entire thesis. Its wide dissemination within the administration confirms that geopolitical concepts were an important element in containment thinking.

⁹⁸ TOF, SF, Reel 37 0572-0672, Intelligence Division, Department of War, 'The Soviet Union', ca. January 1947.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

The picture in 1948 is little different, though there was no document as large, as widely disseminated, or as explicitly geopolitical as the War Department's intelligence handbook. Yet the geopolitics of containment was present in crucial policy documents such as the reports of the National Security Council, which were much more restricted than the 1947 handbook. They consequently reflect the thinking of the administration's upper echelons, where the handbook is an indication of what the lower ranks knew. Two of these policy documents are especially salient, namely NSC 14/1 and NSC 20/4. NSC 14/1 discussed the importance of military aid to "certain free nations" whose "success ... in resisting aggression by the forces of Soviet directed world communism is of critical importance to the security of the United States." Though less direct, such a formulation of U.S. security recalls the more clearly geopolitical thinking witnessed in the 1947 State Department review of foreign aid, discussed above, in which certain countries falling to communism was equally unacceptable.¹⁰⁰

NSC 20 was a series of reports, issued between July and November of 1948 and supervised by Kennan (some of the reports were in fact reissues of Policy Planning Staff reports). They were written in response to a request by Secretary of the Navy (and later Defense) James Forrestal, who wanted to know what the military preparedness of the United States was, in light of the world situation. In NSC 20/4, released in November after receiving final approval by the President, "Soviet behavior" is cited as proof of the fact that Moscow is pursuing "the domination of the world." As a result, the Soviets could overrun "in about six months all of Continental Europe and the Near East as far as Cairo, while simultaneously occupying important continental points in the Far East." This would result in such a "concentration of hostile power" which posed "an unacceptable threat to the security of the United States." The report concluded by saying that "Soviet domination of ... Eurasia ... would be strategically and politically unacceptable to the United States." Furthermore, a geopolitical concept of containment policy is demonstrated when, to reach U.S. goals of preventing the aforementioned doom scenario, NSC planners recommend the government to "encourage and promote the gradual retraction of undue Russian power ... from the present perimeter areas around traditional Russian boundaries."¹⁰¹

Militarizing containment

In 1948, President Truman won a wholly unexpected second term, together with the first Democratic majority in Congress since 1946. It was marked by a further deterioration of relations with Moscow.

¹⁰⁰ *Foreign Relations of the United States* (hereafter: FRUS): 1948 I pt. 2, 585-588, NSC 14/1.

¹⁰¹ FRUS: 1948 I pt. 2, 663, 665, 667-668, NSC 20/4.

This was the result of escalating crises and new reverses abroad, such as the formation of mutually antagonistic military alliances in West and East, the detonation of the first Soviet atomic bomb, and the communist takeover of China. The Korean War was to follow. All the while, an increasing emphasis on military strength and readiness as keystones of containment developed. Because of this, non-military policies that had originally been launched as more important to the success of containment than armed strength (such as the ERP) were reduced to stepping stones toward achieving the latter. As argued in chapter three, this militarization of containment characterizes the policy in Truman's final four years in office.

1949, the year the aforementioned reverses took place, was also the year in which the Military Assistance Program (MAP) was launched. This was a \$1.8 billion containment instrument which, as formulated by the National Security Branch of the Bureau of the Budget (part of the President's Executive Office) in the spring of 1949, had the political objective of preventing “domination of friendly countries by the USSR” and the military goal of enabling “Western European and Middle Eastern nations to fight delaying actions in case of Soviet aggression.” As Omar Bradley, speaking for the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told the House of Representatives (which was hearing the administration before voting on the MAP) in July, the ERP was just “the first step” in the overall strategic plan (that is, containment). The program, Bradley stated, was part of a larger strategy based “on considerations of geographical position; industrial capacity; populations, and the will of these peoples; all coupled with their military capacities.” The first three criteria constitute central elements in the geopolitics of the era. Furthermore, Bradley argued that the Soviet Union was a “new aggressor, bent upon absorbing” the non-communist nations of Europe, recalling the same geopolitical concerns seen before in the preceding three years.¹⁰²

A further case for a military buildup was made to Louis Johnson, Truman's new Secretary of Defense, in a memorandum written by Air Force Secretary Symington. This was done in response to the news of the Soviet atomic bomb, and the argument was simple: the Air Force needed to be expanded. Only it, after all, could deliver the atomic bomb. This is a typical document among the later assessments of Soviet foreign policy, focused on Soviet capabilities and assuming that Moscow would attack the moment its strength was greatest compared to that of the U.S. Their political objective would then be “the expansion of Soviet power to the whole of Eurasia.” Only the U.S. was capable of

¹⁰² TOF, SF, Reel 3 0869-0874, National Security Branch, International Activities Branch, Estimates Division, Bureau of the Budget, 'Director's review book: Military Assistance Program, ca. March 1949. TOF, SF, Reel 3 0853-0859, [Draft] statement by General Omar N. Bradley before House Foreign Affairs Committee', July 25, 1949.

preventing such a prospect. Mahan is in fact quoted on the document's last page. A similar assessment of the Soviet threat can be found in a large intelligence review written by the Department of State in the summer of 1949. In it, the conclusion was reached that Soviet weaknesses did not constitute a limit on their foreign policy, and that reverses suffered by the Soviets (e.g. in Greece) were unimportant. In fact, the Soviet Union, which before had already sat "astride the Eurasian heartland," had expanded its boundaries from Eastern Europe to China, vastly increasing its strength and making it one of the world's two greatest powers. The Kremlin's goal was still assumed to be to strike at an opportune time.¹⁰³

By 1950, appraisals of Soviet foreign policy shared the now almost universal conviction that Moscow was after world domination. First seen in 1948, this view had replaced alternatives that had been posited earlier, which were all much more local in scope (expansion to include a security ring around the Soviet Union, and struggles with other powers in areas where interests collided, explanations popular throughout the Truman administration's first three years). As the Joint Chiefs of Staff concluded in a review of the world situation conducted in early 1950, "the fundamental objective of ... the Soviet Union ... is the domination of the world." Since the U.S. was the only nation capable of stopping such an eventuality, it is the adversary that had to be "vanquished" if the Kremlin was to attain its goals. In fact, the U.S. and the USSR were locked in a war "in the absolute sense of the word," even though armed force had not yet been used. "The United States may lose this war and the American way of life without firing a shot," the Joint Chiefs gloomily concluded. Hostility against the Soviet Union had now increased to such a point that pursuing neutrality had become almost tantamount to being part of the enemy camp, a far cry from the containment through integration pursued under Roosevelt. Negotiations, too, would "compromise United States basic security." The policies that had to be adopted in order to stave off such a bleak prospect were at least partially geopolitical in character, such as the maintenance of a "front line" of bases running from Indonesia to Japan. The Soviet Union, the Joint Chiefs concluded, was "winning victories" despite the superior strength of the U.S., "in view of the Soviet geographic position and internal lines in Eurasia" and the aggressive policy of expansion that enabled. Thus it is once again in an appraisal of Soviet actions, and their implications, that the geopolitics of containment most strongly figure.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ TOF, SF, Reel 42 0603-0611, Symington to Johnson, ca. October 1949. TOF, SF, Reel 37 0714-0793, Division of Research for Europe, Office of Intelligence Research, Department of State, 'Soviet internal situation', July 1, 1949.

¹⁰⁴ TOF, CF, Reel 12 0022-0044, The Joint Chiefs of Staff, 'Study on review of current world situation and ability of the forces being maintained to meet U.S. requirements', ca. January 1950.

Similar conclusions were reached in NSC-68, the major review of containment policy ordered by Truman in January 1950 following the “shocks” of 1949, in order to bring greater coherence to U.S. foreign policy. The contents and implications of NSC-68 regarding containment have already been discussed, here and (much more extensively) by other authors. Suffice it to say that the document hugely broadened the scope of containment by adding much wider commitments. This was a process that had been going on for longer, a process which is reflected in the documents cited here, and was part and parcel of the increasingly hostile perceptions of Soviet actions. However, NSC-68 also showcased elements of the geopolitics of containment in NSC-68, as can perhaps be expected in such an important policy document. In NSC-68 as before, the analyses become geopolitical when they become general; containment geopolitics, again as elsewhere, also figure when the discussion becomes military in character. This can be seen when the “fundamental design of the Kremlin” is appraised. The Soviet leadership is held to pursue the preservation of their own power; to that end, however, they had to achieve “the domination of the Eurasian land mass.” This is naturally opposed by the U.S., and therefore the Soviet Union sought its destruction. This geopolitical understanding of Soviet policy existed alongside the ideological explanation of the Cold War as a struggle between freedom and tyranny, which was the conclusion of the following section. These two explanations again coexist when “Soviet intentions and capabilities” are reviewed. Geopolitics did not feature in the analyses of Soviet political and psychological foreign policy instruments (i.e. communist agitation) or economic capacity, but once again emerged when the Kremlin's military was discussed. A list of the immediate campaigns that the Red Army could undertake in the event of war followed, which matched the analysis of Heartland expansion made by Mackinder almost point by point. Additionally, the policy recommendations made in NSC-68, when it comes to the general strategic concept of “points” and “lines” as conceived of by Kennan, are implicitly geopolitical.¹⁰⁵

Korea, geopolitics & containment

The Korean War, which began a little over two months after NSC-68 received the President's approval, quickly came to overshadow all other foreign policy issues in Washington. The invasion of the South by the Soviet-backed North Korean regime, which came as a total surprise to the Truman administration, seemed to confirm all of the apprehensions about Soviet actions that had been voiced in the many reports, memorandums, and studies of the past years. The desire to know what the role of the

¹⁰⁵ TOF, SF, Reel 38 0573-0689, NSC-68, April 7, 1950.

Kremlin was in this action was immediate. As soon as news of the invasion reached Washington, a telegraphic conference was set up in which cabinet members were informed by officials at the embassy in Tokyo about the situation. The first question raised by the Secretary of Defense, Louis Johnson, concerned the role of the Soviets. Though admitting that there was no information on this, the Tokyo embassy responded that “retaliatory Soviet action may be taken against Japan or S[outh] Korea” in response to the American decision to intervene. The embassy also speculated that the invasion “is linked with overall S[outh] E[ast] Asian Communist operations.”¹⁰⁶

This conjecture was given concrete shape four months later. As UN troops overran North Korea and approached the Chinese border at the Yalu River, a series of Central Intelligence Agency reports on the world situation in light of the Korean War was released. In one of these, written only two weeks before the first engagements between UN and Chinese forces, the assumption was made that the ultimate foreign policy goal of the Soviets was “to establish World Communism under the domination of the Kremlin.” However, this ideological approach was only a brief introduction to a document which was concerned with the practical application of Moscow's foreign policy. The geopolitics of containment featured here: some of the “immediate concerns” of the Soviet leadership were held to be “to make secure the strategic approaches, and to prevent the establishment, in Europe and Asia, of forces capable of threatening the Soviet position,” “to eliminate Anglo-American influence in Europe and Asia,” and “to establish Soviet domination over Europe and Asia.” In the conclusion, the CIA assumed that building up military strength is the only way to preclude such events.¹⁰⁷

Because of the increased concern for the Soviet military threat, more emphasis was put on the need to build an effective military infrastructure for the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Many of the discussions on this subject were technical in character, being concerned with needs in materiel and funds, and organizational problems. They conform to the conclusion reached above that the geopolitics of containment did not figure often in such discussions. However, whenever the subject became more general, the geopolitics of containment become a part of the analysis. This is the case in a discussion of the problems encountered in the setting up of NATO, held between Secretary of State Dean Acheson and General Eisenhower, who had just been made Supreme Allied Commander in Europe. Acheson maintained that the Soviet policy was one of “ruthless expansion aimed at world domination.” Getting NATO organized was crucial, because if that did not happen, “Western Europe, with its tremendous

¹⁰⁶ TOF, Korean War File (hereafter: KWF), Reel 1 0329-0330, telegram, Tokyo to Washington.

¹⁰⁷ TOF, KWF, Reel 1 0834-036, Central Intelligence Agency, 'Conclusions regarding a possible Soviet decision to precipitate global war', October 12, 1950.

manpower and industrial potential, will ... fall within the Soviet orbit. This in turn will result in Africa and the Middle East rapidly following ... we risk standing alone in a world whose manpower and resources are dominated by the Soviet Union and aimed at our destruction.” A clearer geopolitical vision from a top cabinet member cannot be imagined.¹⁰⁸

The geopolitics of containment were present also among others in the top levels of the Truman administration. They can be found, for instance, in a report commissioned by Truman for his own use, and spread among several of his closest advisers by his official legal counsel, Charles S. Murphy. It was written by Myron Taylor, a recently retired top diplomat from the Roosevelt era. Taylor concluded his document, which largely conforms to the militarized thinking on containment common at the time, with the statement the Soviet threat rested largely on “the resources and potential of the vast territory which they control.” The Heartland threat here was implicit. Another example of geopolitical thinking at the top level is found in an intelligence review prepared by the CIA in November of 1951. This National Intelligence Estimate 43 was titled “The Strategic Importance of the Far East to the USSR.” It made reference to the geographic aspects of the threat at the opening of its discussion, noting that the Soviet ability to expand in East Asia was weakened by distance and “poor communications” from European Russia. Nevertheless, taking over the Far East would give the Soviet Union unprecedented access to the Pacific, enable it to develop its Siberian hinterland, and finally add greatly to its capability “of breaching remaining US Pacific defenses.” From China, Soviet expansion could continue on into Southeast Asia, and perhaps Japan as well. NIE-43 made clear that such a constellation of industry, manpower and resources would form an unacceptable threat to U.S. security. The report closes with several maps, showing bomber ranges from Beijing and Guangzhou, alongside Tokyo and Manila, geopolitical in the sense that they illustrate the nature of the threat and its solution.¹⁰⁹

By 1952, the last year that Truman was in office, the American government's conviction had become that the “threat of war” was “the main Soviet weapon.” This was how the U.S. position on Soviet actions was described by the steering group for a state visit by British Prime Minister Winston Churchill in January 1952. Evidently this had superseded the main threat according to Kennan, namely takeovers by communist groups under Kremlin command. Containment was also presented in geopolitical terms to Washington's important ally, namely in the form of the establishment of Western strength “close to the Soviet Union and areas under its control,” raising the image of a great ring across

¹⁰⁸ TOF, CF, Reel 18 0529-0534, Acheson to Truman, January 5, 1951.

¹⁰⁹ TOF, SF, Reel 37 0873-0885, Myron Taylor, 'Further observations on the present state of American-Soviet relations', July 31, 1951. DHTP: 22, Doc. 53: NIE-43, November 5, 1951.

Eurasia. Soviet actions, meanwhile, constituted expansion in every direction: “They want to stop the building of military bases within reach of their borders. They want to prevent West German and Japanese rearmament. They want to extend their control over all of Korea and project it into Southeast Asia. They want to prevent the creation of an effective Middle East defense set-up.” Again, as hostility increased and containment was militarized, geopolitics appeared more frequently.¹¹⁰

One of the last issues to emerge during Truman's time in office was the growing crisis surrounding British control of the Suez Canal. The British position there was put under growing pressure by the Egyptian government, which wanted full sovereignty over the Canal and the removal of a large British base in Suez. This was the subject of much agitation in the North African country, which repudiated the 1936 treaty according control of the canal to Britain. This was part of the reason for a coup in July of 1952, which swept a clique of young nationalist officers (among them future Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser) into power, who promptly abolished the monarchy. These developments deeply concerned the U.S., for geopolitical reasons. Egypt was a crucial country for “Middle East defense,” as keeping the region non-communist had become known in Washington, and the Suez Canal was a critically important waterway whatever the case. The West needed “unimpeded use of the Suez Canal at all times,” Acheson telegraphed to British Foreign Minister Anthony Eden in March of 1952. Egypt's orientation toward the West was equally crucial. If Egypt was to act contrarily, and refuse Anglo-American troops entry, “[international] action against Egypt, possibly involving the use of force, might become necessary.” After the coup, Acheson instructed the American ambassador in Cairo to tell the chief of the junta, Muhammad Naguib, that the U.S. was interested in cooperation if Egypt was willing to maintain its Western orientation. “It is proposed that Egypt give certain secret commitments,” Acheson wanted Naguib to know, “assurances to the effect that one of the ultimate objectives of [Egyptian] policy is participation with ... free-world powers in planning the common defense of the area.” Washington also wanted the new regime in Cairo to accept the continuing presence of the British base in Suez, “to insure that they could be speedily and effectively used in event of a threat to the security of the area.” The same offer had already been recommended to Truman in an earlier memorandum, which advised him to approve it “in order to assure the continued availability to the West of the vital British Base in the Suez Canal area.” It is thus in a military context that one of the last examples of the geopolitics of containment under President Truman was formulated.¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ TOF, CF, Reel 4 0669-0678, Steering group on preparations for talks between the President and Prime Minister Churchill, 'Negotiation Paper', January 3, 1952.

¹¹¹ TOF, SF, Reel 28 0168-0175, Acheson to Cairo, March 26, 1952. TOF, SF, Reel 28 0176-0181, Acheson to Truman,

Conclusions

It is helpful at this point to make some general conclusions, which may by now have become apparent. First, as implied above, the geopolitics of containment came into being as part of the larger process of increasing hostility toward the Soviet Union within the U.S. government. It was part and parcel of the rise of containment as the leading foreign policy of the United States.

A second conclusion regards the nature of containment geopolitics, which is the subject of this chapter. Containment was a policy overwhelmingly concerned with what to do about the Soviet Union, and the geopolitics of containment was similarly preoccupied. It was a strain of thought in the American government which attempted to explain Soviet actions, come to conclusions on what their implications were, and recommend policies accordingly. This analytical triptych can be discerned in almost any policy document in which geopolitics was an element.

A third conclusion follows immediately from this, namely that the bulk of geopolitical thought within the Truman administration consisted of attempts to explain Soviet actions (principally the motivations behind them), as well as conclusions about the possible implications of Russian expansionism (which was the principal form of Soviet action according to U.S. planners). Policy recommendations strayed into the field of geopolitics less often.

Finally, a fourth conclusion pertains to the subject of the sources. When the administration's planners discussed particular and technical issues, such as the implementation of a specific policy (the European Recovery Program, for instance), the geopolitics of containment is rarely of influence on the discussion. By contrast, when the subject strays into general terms, such as the worldwide threat of communism or Soviet intentions, the geopolitical thought of the administration comes to the fore most often.

Traditionally, containment was seen as a natural reaction to Soviet aggression. Later, a revisionist school emerged which argued that containment was part of a program of U.S. expansionism, disguised as a defensive measure. More recently, scholars have pointed to all kinds of possible explanations. One of these is the perceptions within the American government. Analyses of this kind, however, have usually focused on perceptions of the Soviet threat. It is clear from the above that such perceptions were informed by a phenomenon heretofore not extensively studied: the geopolitics of containment.

September 30, 1952. TOF, SF, Reel 28, Dean Acheson, 'Memorandum for the President', ca. September 8-18, 1952.

This mode of thinking, present within the U.S. government from 1946 onward, was a way of explaining (and predicting) Soviet actions with the aid of geography, much like the formal, theoretical geopolitics practiced by the likes of Mackinder or Spykman. Its origins can be found in the need for explanations of the increasing tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union as they developed over the course of President Truman's first year in office. As hostility within the U.S. to the Soviet Union grew, so did the influence of geopolitics on containment. As argued extensively above, this was especially the case in the military aspects of containment, which became dominant over the course of 1949.

The geopolitics of containment consisted of what can be termed an analytical triptych. That is, it attempted to explain for Soviet actions, analyze their implications, and provide policy recommendations out of the resulting assessment. Geopolitics figures especially strongly as an explanation and an analysis, and less so as an element in policy recommendations. Shaped by the Cold War, it thus also played a role in giving form to that conflict. Many American policies adopted by the Truman administration were formulated following analyses which were geopolitical in many important ways. It is therefore perhaps possible to modify the geopolitician's contention that it is not just power that matters, but the space in which it is exercised: not simply the space, but also the perception of it is crucial.

6. A Closed World

Halford Mackinder began his seminal 1904 paper, which opened the way toward geopolitical analysis, with the assertion that “the map of the world has been completed with approximate accuracy.” As a result, it had become possible to speak of a “closed political system” encompassing the globe. The world had, in other words, been closed. There was no more “unknown space” left; henceforth, the forces of international politics would have to be exercised within a limited arena. The world was finally open to analysis in its entirety.¹¹²

The British geographer was concerned that in this arena his country and its empire would be shoved aside by the immense continental forces emanating from the famous region he defined himself, the Heartland. These forces were under control of the nation that straddled it, Russia. The resulting expansion would have to be dammed in, quite literally, in a region encircling the Heartland.¹¹³

Barely more than forty years later, as the Cold War began, it seemed as if Mackinder had not just been an original thinker and cross-disciplinary scholar, but nothing less than a visionary. His 1904 article seemed to have accurately predicted, with the aid of an objective science such as geography, the state of affairs of the world forty years before it occurred. “My concept of the Heartland,” Mackinder himself wrote in 1943, “... is more valid and useful today than it was either twenty or forty years ago.” He continued, “the Heartland is the greatest natural fortress on earth,” and “for the first time in history it is manned by a garrison sufficient both in number and quality.” Put differently, the Heartland had in no point previously in history been as potent as it had become under Joseph Stalin's Soviet Union. What is more, by the late 1940s, the American government under Harry S. Truman had implemented a policy that was strongly reminiscent of the imperial policy Mackinder himself had called on London to adopt four and a half decades before. This was the policy of containment.¹¹⁴

Was that a coincidence, or is there more at work here? This is the inquiry that lies at the basis of the research questions of this thesis: was American foreign policy during the early Cold War influenced by geopolitics? If so, how? Delving into these questions has revealed important aspects of the origins of the Cold War that have heretofore been touched upon only very summarily and in passing. U.S. policies during the period were a crucial part of the Cold War's beginning, and scholars of this period

¹¹² Mackinder, 'The geographical pivot of history', 421-423.

¹¹³ Ibid. 423-437.

¹¹⁴ H. J. Mackinder, 'The round world and the winning of peace', *Foreign Affairs* 21 (1943) 595-605.

have so far paid little attention to the role played by geopolitics in their formulation.

American foreign policy during the early Cold War was influenced by geopolitics. Geopolitical thinking was present at almost every level of the American government during the Truman Presidency. It is more relevant, however, as well as more interesting, to answer the second half of the question. How far did this influence extend? What was its nature?

Based on a quantitative study of the primary source material, the extent of the influence of geopolitics on American foreign policy in the early Cold War was significant. More than half of the consulted sources contain geopolitical thinking. They reveal a geopolitical understanding within President Truman's administration that was widespread and persistent throughout all but the first year of his time in office. It must be remarked here, however, that the research conducted for this was limited and by no means extensive enough to reach a final conclusion on the precise extent of the influence of geopolitics on Truman's foreign policy. Nevertheless, that it was significant is beyond doubt.

The quantitative study also revealed the first evidence of the nature of the geopolitical influences on containment. That is, the geopolitics found in the sources have no directly demonstrable connection to the geopolitical theories of the time. None of the unique terminology of those theories is directly cited in the archival material, and neither are their authors. Does this mean that one cannot speak of geopolitics in the sources at all?

This is not the case. Other terms, which are not as explicitly connected to specific theories of geopolitics but are demonstrably geopolitical themselves, are regularly used in the consulted documents. It is therefore possible to speak of an explicit geopolitics, that is the theoretical discipline of the time which is not found in the sources, and an implicit geopolitics, which is. It is this latter that forms the geopolitics of containment.

Upon studying the sources themselves, beyond merely counting them, three important conclusions about the nature of this geopolitics of containment become apparent. First, it emerged together with containment as a whole, in an atmosphere of increasing conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union. It was an integral part of this development. Second, containment geopolitics, being a way of analyzing Soviet foreign policy, appears in three forms. This analytical triptych, as I have called it, is divided into explanations of Soviet actions, judgments of their implications, and policy recommendations in response. A third and final conclusion follows from this, namely that the geopolitics of containment was most often used to explain Soviet policy or judge its

implications. Geopolitical policy recommendations are less frequent by comparison.

Being an integral part of the administration's thinking on containment, the geopolitics of containment went through a similar development as containment itself. As containment shifted away from being a policy largely focused on economic aid to one emphasizing military strength, so its geopolitics appear more and more regularly as this development took place. More than half of the sources found that contain geopolitical thought were written during Truman's second term. This was precisely the period in which containment was militarized, as well.

The reader will recall Mackinder's assertion that the early twentieth century had brought, in the present author's paraphrase, a closed world. Finally a single political system, it could now be analyzed as a whole. His conclusion can be rephrased presently, with the newly acquired knowledge of the mid-twentieth century, included in this thesis, in mind. This period saw the rise of the United States to an unprecedented position of global power. Whatever this country did had its repercussions across the globe. The world had indeed become a single political system. Yet the actions which brought the U.S. into newspaper headlines were the products of extensive analysis and discussion within its government. Perception played as much of a role in this as facts. As can readily be seen in the policy documents of the time, this is precisely the case in the history of containment. The more hostility toward and fear of the Soviet Union increased, the more its actions fit into the perceived pattern of aggression. The geopolitics of containment were an integral part of this pattern, and helped map it. The closed world was therefore not just Mackinder's arena of objective study. It is a term that can also be used for the Truman administration's increasingly narrow world view, of which the geopolitics that the British geographer helped create were an integral if oft-overlooked part.

Consulted Literature

Black, Jeremy, *Geopolitics* (London 2009).

Blouet, Brian W. (ed.), *Global geostrategy: Mackinder and the defence of the West* (New York 2005).

Cox, Michael, 'From the Truman Doctrine to the second superpower detente: The rise and fall of the Cold War', *Journal of Peace Research* 27:1 (1990) 25-41.

Gaddis, John Lewis, *Strategies of containment: A critical appraisal of postwar American national security policy* (Oxford 1982).

Jervis, Robert, 'Was the Cold War a security dilemma?', *Journal of Cold War Studies* 3:1 (2001) 36-60.

Kennedy, Paul, *The rise and fall of the Great Powers: Economic change and military conflict from 1500 to 2000* (London 1988).

Kristof, Ladis, 'The origins and evolution of geopolitics', *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 4:1 (1960) 15-51.

Mackinder, H. J., *Democratic ideals and reality* (London 1919).

Mackinder, H. J., 'The geographical pivot of history', *The Geographical Journal* 23:4 (1904) 421-437.

Mackinder, H. J., 'The round world and the winning of peace', *Foreign Affairs* 21 (1943) 595-605.

Leffler, Melvyn P., 'The Cold War: What do "We Now Know"?', *The American Historical Review* 104:2 (1999) 501-524.

Leffler, Melvyn P., 'National security & US foreign policy', in Leffler, Melvyn P., & David S. Painter (eds.), *Origins of the Cold War* (New York & Milton Park 2005) 15-41.

Lundestad, Geir, 'Empire by invitation? The United States and Western Europe, 1945-1952', *Journal of Peace Research* 23:3 (1986) 263-277.

Østerud, Øyvind, 'The uses and abuses of geopolitics', *Journal of Peace Research* 25:2 (1988) 191-199.

Toal, Gerard, 'Problematizing geopolitics: Survey, statesmanship and strategy', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers, New Series* 19:3 (1994) 259-272.

Painter, David S. & Melvyn P. Leffler, 'Introduction: The international system and the origins of the Cold War', in Leffler, Melvyn P., & David S. Painter (eds.), *Origins of the Cold War* (New York & Milton Park 2005) 1-12.

Parker, Geoffrey, *Western geopolitical thought in the twentieth century* (Worcester 1985).

Poelle, Mark, *Raising cartographic consciousness: The social and foreign policy vision of geopolitics in the twentieth century* (New York 1999).

Sempa, Francis P., 'Mackinder's world,'
http://www.unc.edu/depts/diplomat/AD_Issues/amdipl_14/sempa_mac1.html (08-12-2010).

Sempa, Francis P., 'Spykman's world',
http://www.unc.edu/depts/diplomat/item/2006/0406/semp/sempa_spykman.html (08-12-2010).

Sloan, G. R., *Geopolitics in United States strategic policy, 1890-1987* (Brighton 1988).

Smith, Neil, *American empire: Roosevelt's geographer and the prelude to globalization* (Berkeley 2004).

Archival Collections

- *Documentary History of the Truman Presidency.*
- *Foreign Relations of the United States.*
- President Harry S. Truman Office Files, 1945-1953 (Roosevelt Study Center, Middelburg).
 - Correspondence File.
 - Subject File.
 - Korean War File.