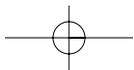
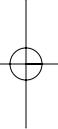
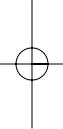
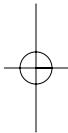
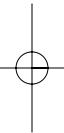
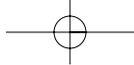


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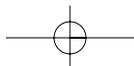


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# **ANOTHER SUCH VICTORY**

*President Truman and the Cold War,  
1945–1953*

ARNOLD A. OFFNER

*Stanford University Press, Stanford, California 2002*

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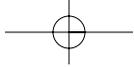
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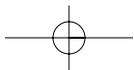
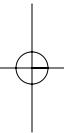
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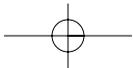
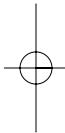
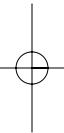
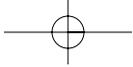
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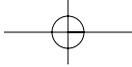
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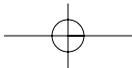
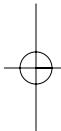
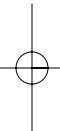


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## Preface

At the start of the twenty-first century, President Harry S. Truman's reputation stands high. This is especially true regarding his stewardship of foreign policy although, ironically, he entered the Oval Office in 1945 untutored in world affairs. Moreover, during his last year in the White House the Republicans accused his administration of having surrendered fifteen countries and 500 million people to Communism and of having sent twenty thousand Americans to their "burial ground" in Korea. Near the end of his term, Truman's public "favorable" rating had plummeted to 23 percent.<sup>1</sup>

Within a decade, however, historians rated Truman a "near great" president, crediting his administration with reconstructing Western Europe and Japan, resisting Soviet or Communist aggression from Greece to Korea, and forging collective security through the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). In the 1970s the "plain speaking" Truman became a hero in popular culture. In 1986 Britain's Roy Jenkins hailed Truman as a "backwoods politician who became a world statesman." Recently, biographers have depicted him as the allegory of American life, an ordinary man whose extraordinary character led him to triumph over adversity from childhood through the presidency. Some writers, such as David McCullough, have even posited a symbiotic relationship between "His Odyssey" from Independence to the White House and America's rise to triumphant superpower status. Melvyn Leffler, in his prize-winning *A Preponderance of Power*, has judged Truman to have been neither a naïf nor an idealist but a realist who understood the uses of power, and whose administration, despite serious, costly errors, prudently preserved America's national security against real or perceived Soviet threats. And for the last quarter of a

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century, nearly every Democratic or Republican candidate for president has claimed to be a latter-day Truman.<sup>2</sup>

Collapse of the Soviet Union and Europe's other Communist states, whose archives have confirmed Truman's belief in 1945 that their regimes governed largely by "clubs, pistols and concentration camps," has further raised the former president's standing. This has encouraged John Lewis Gaddis and other historians to focus on Stalin's murderous domestic rule as the key determinant of Soviet foreign policy and the Cold War. As Gaddis has contended, Stalin was heir to Ivan the Terrible and Peter the Great, as well as to Karl Marx and V. I. Lenin. The Soviet leader was responsible for more state-sanctioned murders than Adolf Hitler and treated world politics as an extension of domestic politics: a zero-sum game in which his gaining security meant depriving all others of it. For Gaddis and others, that is basically the answer to the question of who caused the Cold War.<sup>3</sup>

But as Walter LaFeber has said, to dismiss Stalin's policies as the work of a paranoid is to greatly oversimplify the complex origins of the Cold War. Indeed, recent revelations from many sources—including Soviet, German, Eastern European, Chinese, and Korean archives, published government documents, memoirs, and oral histories—have provided an extremely complex picture of relations between and among nations and the interplay between foreign and domestic policies and ideology and geopolitical issues during the formative Cold War years of 1945–1953. Recent scholarship has put forward new information, insights, and lines of argument, but, as Leffler has pointed out, the conclusions that have emerged are highly diverse and no "single master narrative" suffices to explain the Cold War.<sup>4</sup>

Further, despite recent emphasis on Stalin as one who combined the worst traits of tsarist imperialism and Communist ideology, historians drawing on newly available materials seem to be of the preponderant view that the Soviet leader pursued a cautious but brutal *realpolitik* in world affairs. He aimed to restore Russia's 1941 boundaries, establish a sphere of influence in border states, provide security against a recovered Germany or Japan or hostile capitalist states, and gain compensation—notably German reparations—for the ravages of war. Stalin calculated forces, put Soviet state interests ahead of Marxist-Leninist ideology, recognized the superior industrial and military power of the United States, and pursued pragmatic or opportunistic policies in critical areas such as Germany, China, and Korea.<sup>5</sup>

There is no evidence that Stalin intended to march his Red Army westward beyond its assigned European occupation zones. He did not intend to attack Iran or Turkey, and he afforded little support to Communist revolution in Greece and China. He also seriously miscalculated when he let Kim Il Sung persuade

him that North Korea could win a swift victory over South Korea before the U.S. could or would intervene.

So too have new sources and new assessments provided vital insights into the foreign policy of Mao Zedong and his Chinese Communist Party (CCP). As historian Michael Hunt has shown, Mao was a Chinese populist and patriot bent on throwing off foreign domination and imperial control of his nation and restoring it—the Middle Kingdom—to its rightful place in Asia and the world. From the start of his revolution in the 1920s until the 1940s, he pursued pragmatic alliances at home and abroad, and he was prepared to accept U.S. assistance consistent with his principles. He welcomed both the first official American visitors, the “Dixie Mission,” to his headquarters in 1944 and the mediating mission of General George C. Marshall in 1946. Mao felt betrayed by Marshall’s failure to effect the coalition government to which the CCP had agreed, and by U.S. military support for Jiang Jieshi’s Guomindang (GMD) regime to wage civil war against the CCP.<sup>6</sup>

Still, Mao was amenable in 1949 to relations with the U.S. provided it broke relations with the GMD and accepted the CCP revolution. But Truman refused to deal with the emergent People’s Republic of China (PRC) and supported the GMD’s counterrevolutionary war from its new base on Taiwan. This only hastened Mao’s seeking an alliance with the USSR, but the Chinese leader proved far less subservient than Stalin expected and Truman presumed. In fact, the Sino-Soviet treaty of 1950 forced Stalin to divest his recently regained imperial port and railroad concessions in Manchuria, and limited the two nations’ defensive agreement to matters of mutual interest, thus freeing the PRC from the need to take part in any American-Soviet conflict in Europe.<sup>7</sup>

It is also evident from new documents that Mao would have preferred to focus on domestic reconstruction rather than enter the Korean War in 1950. But the U.S. decision to permit General Douglas MacArthur’s forces to cross the 38th parallel and march unconstrained toward the PRC border posed too great a threat. Nonetheless, newly available Russian documents indicate that even as late as October 2, 1950, Mao, who faced strong Politburo opposition to China’s entering the war, cabled Stalin that the PRC lacked the necessary troops and equipment to fight. But goaded by Stalin and fearful that opponents at home and abroad would be “swollen with arrogance” if enemy troops reached the Yalu, Mao committed the PRC to a war that, for many reasons, would have dire consequences for the Chinese, American, and Korean people. Still, it is clear that prior to October 1950 the CCP leadership had never shown the intention to use military force to conspire with the Kremlin to upset the status quo in Asia or drive the U.S. from the area.<sup>8</sup>

Thus the time seems propitious, given our increased knowledge of Soviet,

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European, Chinese, and Korean policies, to reconsider President Truman's role in the Cold War. As Thomas G. Paterson has written, the president stands at the pinnacle of the diplomatic and military establishment, he has great capacity to set the foreign policy agenda and to mold public opinion, and his importance—especially in Truman's case—cannot be denied. Contrary to prevailing views, however, I believe that Truman's policy making was shaped by his parochial and nationalistic heritage. This was reflected in his uncritical belief in the superiority of American values and political-economic interests, his conviction that the Soviet Union and Communism were the root cause of international strife, and his inability to comprehend Asian politics and nationalism. Truman's parochialism also caused him to disregard contrary views, to engage in simplistic analogizing, to show little ability to comprehend the basis for other nations' policies, and to demonize those leaders or nations who would not bend to the will of the U.S. Consequently, his foreign policy leadership intensified Soviet-American conflict, hastened division of Europe, and brought tragic intervention in Asian civil wars and a generation of Sino-American enmity.<sup>9</sup>

In short, Truman lacked the qualities of the creative or great leader who, as James MacGregor Burns has written, must broaden the environment in which he and his citizenry operate and widen the channels in which choices are made and events flow. Truman, to the contrary, narrowed Americans' perception of the world political environment and the channels for policy choices, and created a rigid framework in which the United States waged long-term, extremely costly global Cold War. Indeed, before we celebrate America's victory in this contest, we might recall that after King Pyrrhus' Greek forces defeated the Romans at the battle of Asculum in 280 B.C., he reflected that "another such victory, and we are undone."<sup>10</sup>

## Acknowledgments

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Robert Beisner, Fred Greenstein, Hope Harrison, Lawrence Kaplan, Walter LaFeber, Norman Naimark, Edmund Wehrle, and Randall Woods have all read

## xiv Acknowledgments

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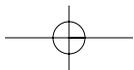
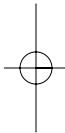
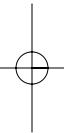
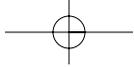
join this faculty, and they have continued to demonstrate enthusiasm for my work. My past and present History Department colleagues, Jack Cell, Andy Fix, D. C. Jackson, Deborah Rosen, Donald Miller, Richard Sharpless, and Robert Weiner, all bear responsibility for having taken me in (as they like to say) ten years ago, for accepting my peripatetic lifestyle, and for encouraging new colleagues, Paul Barclay and Joshua Sanborn, to be equally forbearing.

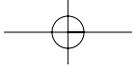
I also owe great thanks to Lafayette's provost, June Schlueter, an outstanding scholar in her field of English, who truly understands the search for documents and an elusive truth. She has been a patient and strong supporter of all my endeavors, as well as a very good friend. Similarly, President Arthur Rothkopf has consistently encouraged my scholarly pursuits and my participation in Lafayette's exceptional system of shared governance, and he has been remarkably tolerant of my sometimes contrarian ideas in both realms. I have learned a great deal from his style of leadership and feel privileged to have him as a friend.

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I remain solely responsible for all errors of fact or interpretation in this book.

Arnold A. Offner  
Easton, Pennsylvania, and Newton, Massachusetts





# **ANOTHER SUCH VICTORY**

